

Racial Segregation and the San Francisco Musicians' Union, 1923–60

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Abstract

The practice of segregated union locals, common in the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) during the first half of the twentieth century, led to racial confrontation in San Francisco. In 1934, black Local 648 sued its much larger counterpart, Local 6, which had attempted to control all musical employment in the Bay Area. Though Local 648 eventually withdrew its suit, its charter was revoked and black musicians were placed in “subsidiary” status. A new “colored local” (669) was chartered in 1946 and worked alongside Local 6 until the state forced amalgamation in 1960. Many other segregated locals did not merge until the late 1960s or early 1970s.

The saga of Locals 6, 648, and 669 brings into focus the complex social and economic forces buffeting the working musician in the early twentieth century. Racist attitudes in the US labor movement, mirrored in the musicians' union, forced blacks to organize separately and accept lower wages in order to secure employment. The AFM, for its part, was constrained by its dedication to local autonomy. Black union musicians were themselves divided—torn between outrage at their second-class status and the apparent benefits of working for change from within the organization.

On 8 February 2004, the San Francisco branch of the American Federation of Musicians (Local 6) held a joyous if belated celebration to commemorate a turning point in its history: the merger—forty-four years earlier—with Local 669, one of about fifty so-called “colored locals” in the country.¹ As in many US cities, the San Francisco AFM had been racially segregated for an extended period: from December 1923 (when a black local was first chartered in the area) to April 1960 (after the state of California demanded an end to racial separation). During most of this thirty-six-year period, two locals—one black, one white—competed for jobs in the same region. Preparations for the 2004 celebration uncovered many details of the 1960 merger. Stories on local history and portraits of some African American members appeared prominently on Local 6's website and in its monthly magazine, *The Musical News*.² The earlier history, however—particularly the bitter

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¹ *The Musical News* 76/2 (March 2004): 1. The event was spearheaded by former Local 6 president Melinda Wagner.

² For example, Alex Walsh, “A Brief History of Local 6” and “Earl Watkins—Mr. Lucky,” and Steven Meicke, “A History of the Musicians Union Local 6, American Federation of Musicians,” American Federation of Musicians Local 6 website, <http://www.afm6.org>. Walsh also prepared an oral history of Eddie Alley for the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum.

confrontations that erupted between the two locals before World War II—remained largely unknown.

The present article reconstructs the turbulent history of San Francisco's segregated union, highlighting in the process the central role of the AFM in the life of working musicians and the national struggle of blacks to gain recognition within that organization. Prior to passage of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, the AFM was extremely powerful, exerting substantial control over both temporary and ongoing employment. In 1929 Anna Green wrote (with perhaps a bit of hyperbole) that Local 6 enjoyed "practically 100% control over the so-called 'steady' engagements and approximately 90% control over the casual engagements."³ Not once in her detailed study of the San Francisco union does Green mention the parallel black local (No. 648), which at the time held jurisdiction over the same territory. Indeed, she seems completely unaware of its existence. Her nescience epitomizes the black union's struggle: for years its members vied for recognition and respect against a far more powerful white competitor.

Segregated unions in the AFM were hardly unique to San Francisco. When the Bay Area locals merged in 1960, racially separated unions were still operating in forty-five cities, many outside the South: Denver, Omaha, Boston, Hartford, Atlantic City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Buffalo, and Washington DC, to name but a few.⁴ This pattern of segregation had been established since the beginning of the century both in the AFM and in its parent body, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), whose segregationist policies were eventually challenged by the competing Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).⁵ As this article will show, however, the musicians' union was surprisingly dilatory about forcing integration within its ranks.

Though segregation was widespread throughout the country, competition between the black and white locals became especially bitter in San Francisco: union members clashed over jobs in the clubs and the courts; blacks were relegated to subsidiary status for ten years during the Depression and World War II; and the white union voted against integration as late as 1956. Social conditions affecting workers on a national scale fueled this conflict: expanding job opportunities in the 1920s, massive unemployment in the 1930s, discriminatory politics within the AFL, and the effects of Prohibition and its revocation. But it took specific local conditions to propel competition into confrontation: the size of San Francisco's African American community forced blacks into direct competition with whites,

³ Anna Welda Green, "Musicians' Union of San Francisco" (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1929), 2–3.

⁴ Julie Ayer, *More Than Meets the Ear: How Symphony Musicians Made Labor History* (Minneapolis: Syren Book Co., 2005), 108–9, lists forty-three locals that merged between 1960 and 1971 in her chapter on "Segregated Musicians Union Locals." However, this list is undependable. Fourteen of these locals were not segregated (the merger merely involved adjacent geographical areas); several branch numbers are incorrect; and many relevant locals are omitted. The chapter in question contains numerous errors. The author confuses "colored" locals with subsidiaries, for example, and makes errors in dates, sometimes by several years.

⁵ The CIO was founded in 1935 as the Committee for Industrial Organization. Its name changed in 1938.

and aggressive activism by a few officers of Local 6 left blacks with little choice other than a counterattack that garnered support from club owners and attorneys.

To their credit, the current officers of Local 6 have made no attempt to hide or excuse this history, encouraging and aiding my investigation into a decidedly uncomfortable chapter in their organization's past.⁶ Similarly, I have met with exceptional cooperation from national officers and those in other locals, who have corresponded by phone or e-mail and sent numerous materials that document the relevance of the San Francisco story to that in other urban areas. I hope to repay this generosity here and help to counteract a difficult past by exposing the historical record.

The AFL, the AFM, and the Black Worker

San Francisco at the end of the nineteenth century was a union town. Along with many other professions, musicians in California began organizing in mid-century, and short-lived unions were founded in the city in 1869 and 1874.⁷ On 3 September 1885, a Musicians' Mutual Protective Union was established; the following May, its 137 members joined the National League of Musicians (NLM) as Local No. 10. Although the NLM grew rapidly—within ten years there were more than a hundred affiliates—the organization was crippled by its overcommitment to local autonomy, limiting its national impact.⁸ The American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886, repeatedly urged the NLM to join, but officials of the musicians' union declined, viewing themselves as artists rather than laborers. Nevertheless, in October 1896 twenty-six local musicians' unions (seventeen affiliated with the NLM) sent delegates to the AFL convention, leading to the establishment of the American Federation of Musicians. After a confrontation the following May, when

⁶ Gretchen Elliott, Alex Walsh, and Melinda Wagner from San Francisco's Local 6 were extremely helpful and generous with their time. Among the many other union officials who sent me documentation and detailed information, I would particularly like to acknowledge Lew Mancini (assistant secretary at the AFM), Bob Crothers (retired assistant to the AFM president), John Grimes (vice president of Boston's Local 9-535), Gordon Stump (president of Detroit's Local 9), Dan Stevenson (president of Des Moines's Local 75), and Warren Johnson (secretary-treasurer of Seattle's Local 76-493). I am also extremely grateful to Lawrence Gushee for sharing with me his sources on the early history of Local 6; Earl Watkins for the informative interview and numerous phone calls; attorney Dennis Caspe for helping me understand the Superior Court's Record of Action; and, most especially, my tireless research assistant, Alissa Roedig.

⁷ Green, "Musicians' Union of San Francisco," 11, gives information on wage demands by musicians in conjunction with the California statehood celebrations of 1850 and the July Fourth celebrations of 1852. In both cases, the musicians were unsuccessful. Similar stories are told by Meicke, "History of the Musicians Union Local 6," 3, and Phyllis Kern, "A Centennial History of San Francisco Musician's Union, Local 6" (pamphlet published by the Musicians Union Local 6, 1985), 1. Other sources on the early history of the San Francisco union include James G. Dewey, "Sixtieth Anniversary of Musicians' Union Local No. 6 of American Federation of Musicians," *The Musical News* 40/1 (February 1957): 1; and Caesar Brand, "Golden Reminiscences," serialized in *The Musical News* 18 (1935): February, 14; March, 11–12; April, 11–12; June, 18–20; August, 15–16; and September, 12, 19, 21.

⁸ On the NLM and the history of the AFM, see James P. Kraft, "Artists as Workers: Musicians and Trade Unionism in America, 1880–1917," *Musical Quarterly* 79/3 (Autumn 1995): 512–43; George Seltzer, *Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989); and "The American Federation of Musicians: Celebrating Our Centennial," special issue of the *International Musician*, ed. Jessica Roe (October 1996).

both organizations held conventions simultaneously in Kansas City, the NLM revoked the charters of its rebel members, but by doing so only hastened its own demise. Within months, half of the NLM locals had switched their affiliation to the AFM and by 1904 the NLM was defunct. San Francisco was among the first to affiliate with the AFM: Local No. 6 was chartered on 2 February 1897.

In its early years, the AFL tried to enforce a policy of racial integration. In 1890, it refused to admit the machinists because of a “whites only” clause in their constitution. Five years later the offensive clause was removed, but replaced with a pledge in the initiation ritual “binding each member to propose only white men for membership.”⁹ Despite this ruse, the machinists were readmitted. As an umbrella organization for diverse trade unions, the AFL learned quickly that it had to grant considerable autonomy to its affiliates in order to keep them in the fold. Thus, in the interest of increasing its effectiveness, it backed off from its early stand for equality, turning a blind eye to the discriminatory policies of some of its member unions. It even encouraged other unions, such as the boilermakers and blacksmiths, to follow the model of the machinists. In 1900, the AFL officially adopted a policy of issuing separate “federal” charters to unions “composed exclusively of colored members.” This practice, which continued for decades, seriously disadvantaged black workers: jurisdictional disputes arose frequently, members of black affiliates had minimal representation at national conventions, and black workers were given ineffective representation in labor negotiations.¹⁰ At later AFL conventions resolutions were introduced to reject discriminatory practices, but they were defeated or sent to committees to die a quiet death.¹¹ As late as 1946—more than a decade after the competing CIO was founded with an active program of courting African Americans—nine unions, with 707,500 members nationwide, still specifically excluded blacks in their constitutions.¹² The American Federation of Musicians was

⁹ Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1931), 89. See also Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York: Harper, 1944), 8; and Philip Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619–1973* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 65, 70. This ritual was still cited by the San Francisco black press in 1934. See “Amer. Federation of Labor Rapped for Its Two Faced Policy in Treating Race,” *The Spokesman*, 20 September 1934, 3.

¹⁰ See the AFL *Proceedings* of 1900, 6, 22–23, and 112; and Foner, *Organized Labor*, 72–73. The separate but equal concept was sanctioned by the US Supreme Court in the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* case in 1896.

¹¹ Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, 89–92; Northrup, *Organized Labor*, 9–10. For example, see the AFL *Proceedings* of 1919, 304–6 (discussion of various resolutions about exclusion and reaffirmation of the policy of separate black unions); and 1920, 307–10 (discussion of Resolution 5); and 351–52 (discussion of Resolution 37).

¹² Five were associated with the AFL; four were independent. Eight were railroad unions. See Clyde W. Summers, “Admission Policies of Labor Unions,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 61/1 (November 1946): 68. The CIO, instead of following the AFL’s trade union model, organized vertically by industry, including both skilled and unskilled workers. Dedicated to integration from the start (like the old Knights of Labor in the nineteenth century), it courted members of all races. For an interesting view of the situation in the mid-1940s, see Robert C. Weaver, “Recent Events in Negro Union Relationships,” *Journal of Political Economy* 52/3 (September 1944): 234–49. The centrality of the CIO in the social and cultural climate of the nation was so strong that Michael Denning labels the period from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s as the “Age of the CIO.” See Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

not among them, however. Fifteen musicians in any unorganized territory could apply for a new charter. Membership was restricted to instrumentalists and citizens (or intended citizens) of the United States. Both men and women were eligible.

Although the AFM's constitution contained no discriminatory language, it did not forbid racial separation. Eventually the musicians' unions in most large US cities followed the AFL's separate but (ostensibly) equal lead. Beginning with Chicago's Local 208 in 1902, the AFM gradually chartered "colored" locals throughout the country. Notable exceptions were Detroit (Local 5) and New York (Local 310, later 802), both integrated throughout their history.¹³

Aside from explicit exclusion through constitutional regulations, blacks were often barred from union membership by more subtle means. Plumbers, for instance, had to be licensed by the state; white union members often sat on licensing boards. In the musicians' union, the local board of directors was empowered to grant admission, often on the basis of an audition. Though the audition could be used to exclude black applicants, I have found no information to suggest that Local 6 designed its process with such a goal. In fact, in its earliest years the San Francisco local did admit some African American members. Lawrence Gushee discovered that nine black musicians from Ferdon's Quaker Medicine Show band joined Local 6 in 1908–9.¹⁴

Whether deliberate or not, the audition proved a stumbling block for some black applicants. Reb Spikes recalls problems encountered by Sid LeProtti's "So Different Orchestra" when the group was invited to play at the Porta La Louvre in 1916:

Old man Swanberg had a Union place, so we had to be Union. We went down and took the Union examination, and they said three of us could read and the other three couldn't read. They said Sidney, Williams, and Slocum couldn't read, but we could all read. If we'd taken the job that way, that would'a broken up our combination.¹⁵

Though information from Local 6's minutes differs slightly in detail, it largely substantiates this story. Saxophonist Reb Spikes, bassist Clarence Williams, and clarinetist Slocum Mitchell were admitted to Local 6 on 25 April 1916, but pianist Sid LeProtti and drummer Peter Stanley failed two different auditions. After an attorney for the rejected applicants appealed to the board, a third audition was administered.

¹³ The tempestuous history of the New York local is described in detail in Richard D. Leiter, *The Musicians and Petrillo* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1953), 28–32. New York's Musical Mutual Protective Union (MMPU), which played a leading role in the NLM, resisted affiliation with the AFM, which had chartered Local No. 41. In 1903, this local merged with the MMPU to form Local 310. However, friction between 310 and the national organization led to its expulsion in July 1921. The following month, after theater managers decided to negotiate with the AFM instead of a rival union, the New York local was reinstated as No. 802. Detroit's Local 5 was integrated from its inception, but (according to its current president Gordon Stump) as late as 1986 tracked voting records by race by placing a small x in the upper left corner of the secret ballots submitted by black members. E-mail communication with the author, 2 and 3 September 2006.

¹⁴ Lawrence Gushee, *Pioneers of Jazz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 51–52. In e-mail messages (19 and 21 September 2006), Gushee informed me that he found nine names of band members in Local 6's report to the AFM in the *International Musician*, January 1909, 4.

¹⁵ Tom Stoddard, *Jazz on the Barbary Coast* (Chigwell, Essex: Storyville Publications, 1982), 73.

LeProtti and Stanley failed again.¹⁶ Instead of dismantling their ensemble, the band went to Los Angeles for a few months. When Local 6 went on strike in August, LeProtti and his colleagues returned to San Francisco to play in clubs that were hiring nonunion personnel.¹⁷

The discriminatory policies of organized labor pushed blacks into the arms of management, who particularly welcomed them as strikebreakers (scabs), but often fired them just as quickly once labor disputes were settled. Whereas some blacks came to regard management as paternalistic, many ultimately recognized that they could hope for little advancement outside the powerful union movement. W. E. B. Du Bois articulated this position in a 1924 challenge to the AFL:

For many years the American Negro has been demanding admittance to the ranks of union labor. For many years your organizations have made public profession of your interest in Negro labor, of your desire to have it unionized, and of your hatred of the black "scab."

Notwithstanding this apparent surface agreement, Negro labor in the main is outside the ranks of organized labor, and the reason is first, that white union labor does not want black labor and secondly, black labor has ceased to beg admittance to union ranks because of its increasing value and efficiency outside the unions. . . .

On the other hand, intelligent Negroes know full well that a blow at organized labor is a blow at all labor; that black labor today profits by the blood and sweat of labor leaders in the past who have fought oppression and monopoly by organization. If there is built up in America a great black bloc of non-union laborers who have a right to hate unions, all laborers black and white, eventually must suffer.¹⁸

Despite the alarms Du Bois sounded (and he was certainly not alone), racial integration in the AFL progressed at a glacial pace. Ten years after his article, the issue resurfaced dramatically at the AFL convention in San Francisco—at precisely the moment that the city's segregated musicians' locals were butting heads in court, as we will see.

Setting the Scene: Battles and Breakthroughs in the 1920s

By the time a "colored" musicians' local was chartered in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1923, forty-one cities had racially separate branches. The increase in the number of black locals in this period is striking: in 1919 there were twenty-two; six years later there were forty-three.¹⁹ Several motivations prompted black musicians to organize independently. In some cases, as we have seen, individuals had difficulty passing entrance auditions. In other instances, white locals imposed unacceptable

¹⁶ Local 6 minutes of the board meetings of 25 April, 2 May, 9 May, 16 May, and 18 May 1916 (unpublished). Two musicians from Seattle had been hired in place of the LeProtti band, but ultimately were denied permission to play at the club (which the minutes call the Portola Café). I am extremely grateful to Melinda Wagner for finding these references in the unpublished minutes of Local 6 (predating the instigation of *The Musical News*, which thereafter published the minutes for all meetings).

¹⁷ Information on the strike, which lasted from 1 August to 15 December 1916, is given in Green, "Musicians Union," 76–78.

¹⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, "To the American Federation of Labor," *The Crisis* 28/4 (August 1924): 153.

¹⁹ These numbers are taken from the AFM *Proceedings*, which reflect the situation midyear, at the time the convention was held.

restrictions on blacks, such as limiting social interactions.²⁰ Even in the absence of such restrictions, however, black musicians sometimes found it necessary (or desirable) to organize independently. Boston's Local 9 was integrated from its inception in 1897, for example, but black members requested and obtained a separate charter in 1915. Steven Laifer suggests that these musicians "wanted to have their own identity,"²¹ but more practical considerations may also have prompted this move. For one thing, the members gained national recognition through representation at the AFM's convention, thereby positioning them to exert influence over national policy. But the crux of the issue was likely pay scales: since locals set their own wages, the black organization could offer more competitive pricing.

Pervasive discrimination in the US labor market compelled most black unions to set lower wage scales than competing white affiliates. If the rates were equal, black workers lost jobs to whites. (Cases in which pay scales were identical were a cause for comment—as in the Chicago AFM unions in the late 1930s.)²² The music business was no different from other industries in this regard. An instructive example is a labor dispute between the AFM and Ringling Brothers Circus in the early 1940s. The circus proposed raising wages for whites but not for blacks. Richard Leiter proudly states that the AFM would not agree to this discriminatory treatment, but then concludes: "Eventually the salaries of the white musicians were raised from \$47.50 to \$54.00 per week while those of the Negroes were increased from \$26.50 to \$30.50." The circus hired black musicians only for sideshows.²³

Where work venues were segregated, differential pay scales did not lead to direct confrontation between blacks and whites. Retired AFM executive assistant Bob Crothers recalls that the two Boston locals operated with such independence during the 1930s.²⁴ In other cases, however, the double wage scales could prove extremely problematic, leading to repeated confrontation over jobs.

The black locals were chartered directly by the AFM and sent delegates to the conventions in proportion to their size. Black musicians residing in, or traveling to jurisdictions with segregated unions were obliged to register with the "colored"

²⁰ In Seattle in 1913, for instance, Local 76 allowed blacks to join only if they agreed not to "avail themselves of the headquarters socially," according to David Keller, "Seattle's Segregated Musicians' Union, Local 493, 1918–1956" (master's thesis, Western Washington University, 1996), 26.

²¹ Steven Laifer, in "Looking Back: Merged Locals Are Windows on Changing Times," *International Musician*, February 2003, 16–17, 24, discusses the mergers of white and black locals in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, and New Orleans. Details of the Boston merger are given in Sue-Ellen Hershman, "What's in a Number? The History and Merger of Local 535," *Interlude*, January–February 1993, 4, 12. Hershman does not speculate on why the black musicians of Boston may have wanted a separate charter. I am particularly grateful to John Grimes, vice president of the Boston local, for sending me a copy of Hershman's article, as well as excerpts from oral histories with former members of 535.

²² Bob White, in "Chicago Local Typical of Negro AFM Groups," *Down Beat*, 1 November 1940, 23, states that members of Local 208 played at the same rates as (white) Local 10. Despite the headline, Chicago's Local 208 was not at all typical; it was far larger, more powerful, and more influential than other African American affiliates.

²³ Leiter, *Musicians and Petrillo*, 92–93, and AFM *Proceedings*, 1944 (President's Report), 56.

²⁴ Bob Crothers, phone interview, 15 August 2006. Crothers was executive assistant to the AFM president from the mid-1960s to 1986. Similar reports are given by former members of Local 535 in Boston. See "Musicians Remembering: The Oral History Project of the Boston Musicians' Association, AFM Local 9-535," *Interlude* (November–December 2005): 5–6.

local, no matter how prominent they might be. (Demeaning as this situation was, however, they found separate organization preferable to no organization.) In cities where dual unions operated, the two affiliates were theoretically equal. In practice, however, the (much larger) white locals were far more influential than their black counterparts. As a case in point, in 1928 Seattle's white Local 76 asked AFM president Joseph Weber to clarify its relation to black Local 458 after repeated conflicts arose over venues and pay scales. Weber replied that Local 76 enjoyed oversight privileges.²⁵

In 1916, a year after the black musicians of Boston formed their own union, San Francisco's African Americans tried to follow suit. Two black musicians appeared before Local 6's board in January requesting permission to form a separate "colored" local. (Chartering a new local required approval from the nearest existing local.) Local 6's board denied permission for this potential competition.²⁶ It took nearly eight years until Bay Area black musicians succeeded in forming their own organization: the charter for Local 648 was announced in *The International Musician* in December 1923. Though based in Oakland, 648's jurisdiction was nearly identical to that of Local 6. Both groups operated in San Francisco, Oakland, Alameda, Berkeley, and various towns in the East Bay and Marin County.²⁷

The decade in which Local 648 was chartered was a heady time for musicians. Despite the loss of jobs in taverns, bars, and restaurants when Prohibition took effect in 1920, new and lucrative opportunities were opening up in radio and motion pictures.²⁸ Theater orchestras accompanied silent films and vaudeville acts, and radio stations paid high rates for live music. By 1927–28 radio musicians in San Francisco were earning a minimum of \$6 per hour for casual engagements (equivalent to \$71 in 2006) and by the end of the decade theater musicians earned \$49.85 a week for seven performances (equivalent to \$590 in 2006).²⁹

Local 6 was at the forefront of the battle for higher wages and improved working conditions, repeatedly making headlines through confrontational job actions in 1926, 1928, and 1929. In 1926, it took on Allied Amusement Industries, the umbrella organization for most major theaters in California, seeking higher wages and a six-day work week. In response, management encouraged a rival union, and in doing so mobilized Local 6's 2,700 members. The union squelched the internal revolt

²⁵ Keller, "Seattle's Segregated Musicians' Union," 56.

²⁶ Local 6's board minutes of 13 January 1916 note that "Messrs. Jackson and Long addressed the organization relative to a permit for a strictly colored union, to operate indiscriminately within and without this jurisdiction."

²⁷ The number 648 was previously assigned to a (non-colored) local in Paragould, Arkansas. When locals lost their charters, numbers were reassigned; therefore a higher number does not necessarily represent a later charter. In terms of territory, the AFM *Proceedings* list for both 6 and 648 the towns of Fruitvale, Melrose, and Elmhurst (all in the East Bay and long since absorbed by surrounding cities), and San Rafael, San Anselmo, and Mill Valley in Marin County. In the mid-1930s, Palo Alto is listed in the Local 6 territory, but not in that of 648. These listings are incomplete. Local 6, for instance, gained jurisdiction over other towns on the peninsula when it amalgamated with Local 570 in Redwood City in 1924.

²⁸ Prohibition took effect on 16 January 1920 after ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment.

²⁹ Green, "Musicians' Union," 4–5, 94. According to Green, radio musicians charged overtime at \$4 per hour and were paid an extra \$2 after midnight. Theater musicians were paid for extra performances and were entitled to twenty-minute intermissions for each hour of work.

and dug in its heels on contract demands.³⁰ When musicians walked off their jobs on 1 September, they were supported by sympathy strikes from projectionists and stagehands, a powerful strategy eventually banned by the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. Four days later, after an outpouring of public support, the union won its case.³¹

The peace, however, was short-lived. The invention of “talkies” in 1927 introduced mechanized sound in the theaters, a development the musicians could not stop, no matter how reasonable their demands or how widespread their support from fellow unionists. Nevertheless, the AFM—and Local 6—fought a hard battle. In August 1928, the Embassy Theater dismissed its eight-piece orchestra and two organists, claiming that its new Vitaphones made the musicians redundant. Projectionists, janitors, and stagehands again walked out in sympathy.³² This time the strike led to violence: two scabs imported from Los Angeles were waylaid and one was beaten, though no union involvement was proven.³³

A more extended conflict erupted the following year between Local 6 and Nasser Brothers, operators of twenty-five theaters in the Bay Area. In March 1929, musicians were dismissed at the Castro, Royal, and Alhambra theaters; the owners claimed they were being paid to play cards.³⁴ This time Local 6 took matters to court, bringing in New York attorney Aaron Sapiro who argued that the theaters were obliged to honor two-year contracts.³⁵ His initial request for an injunction “to close show houses unless they employ orchestras” was denied, but on appeal the decision was overturned.³⁶ The conflict turned ugly when a bomb exploded at the Royal Theater on 1 June 1930. Nasser Brothers countersued the unions and appealed the pro-union court decision to the state supreme court. By the time the case was considered, however, the original contract had expired.³⁷

In its fight against the talkies, the AFM shied away from attacking technology per se. Instead, officials mounted aesthetic arguments. “Mechanical music can never

³⁰ “Music Union and Theaters Deadlocked Over Terms,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 August 1926, 7.

³¹ On 4 September 400 bandmen (spearheaded by Local 6 musician Phil Sapiro) marched down the city streets, cheered by enthusiastic crowds. After a fifteen-hour negotiating session, the parties reached agreement (at 5 a.m. Sunday morning) on the six-day week and wage increases. Details of the settlement are given by Green, “Musicians’ Union,” 111–12.

³² “S.F. Talky Theater Refuses Union’s Music Demands,” and “Theater Will Remain Open Despite Order, Says Wagnon,” *Chronicle*, 4 October 1928, 1, 4; and 5 October 1928, 1, 5. See also articles in the *Chronicle* on 7 October, 18; 10 October, 1; 11 October, 7; 12 October, 3; 14 October, 7; and especially 11 October, 13: “Union Employe[e]s Walk Out in Embassy Talkie Row.”

³³ “Embassy Employe[e] Kidnapped, Beaten and Robbed,” *Chronicle*, 15 October 1928, 1; and “Theater Unions Post \$500 Reward for Sluggers,” *Chronicle*, 16 October 1928, 17.

³⁴ “Owners Close Picture House to Musicians,” *Chronicle*, 17 March 1929, 10.

³⁵ The contracts had expiration dates of 1 September 1930. Stench bombs were set off at several theaters during this extended conflict. Numerous articles in the *Chronicle* chart the progress of the conflict. In 1929, see 17 March, 10; 18 March, 5; 19 March, 3; 20 March, 9; 2 April, 5; 3 April, 11; 26 April, 1; 1 May, 21; 2 May, 3; 3 May, 19; 7 May, 6; 11 May, 15; 17 May, 13; 21 May, 8; 3 July, 12. In 1930, see 4 June, 1; and 6 June, 1–2.

³⁶ See these articles in the *Chronicle*: in 1929: 26 May, 8; 1 June, 10; 2 June, 8; 4 June, 3; 7 June, 4; 11 June, 3; 15 June, 3; 20 June, 13; in 1930: 11 April, 7.

³⁷ *Chronicle* 1930: 2 June, 1; 3 June, 3; 4 June, 1; 6 June, 1; 24 June, 3; 26 June, 4; 28 June, 11; 11 July, 5; 12 July, 5; 15 July, 3; 16 July, 11; 26 July, 13; 6 August, 12; 15 August, 5; 2 October, 21; and 31 October, 5.

substitute adequately for real music BECAUSE YOU CANNOT MECHANIZE AN ART,” proclaimed AFM president Joseph Weber. Furthermore, the “substitution of canned music for real music in theatres would seriously injure national culture through . . . lowering the public taste and . . . discouraging young talent.”³⁸

The Early 1930s: The Bubble Bursts

The fight against the talkies was, of course, doomed from the outset, and theater orchestras increasingly became anachronistic. “During three years in the early 1930s,” reported *Business Week*, “13,000 movie houses were wired for sound—and 25,000 musicians lost their jobs.”³⁹ Throughout the country, musicians suffered a double blow: on top of the stock market crash of 1929 and the economic depression that followed, they were increasingly displaced by technology. In San Francisco as elsewhere, the AFM searched for economic aid for its members. Local 6 sponsored a concert on 15 December 1931, featuring an orchestra of two hundred to raise money for unemployed musicians; all performers donated their services.⁴⁰ A series of national “Living Music Days” was sponsored by local newspapers, including the *San Francisco Chronicle*: in September 1933, Local 6 musicians played gratis in stores to promote the cause of live music.⁴¹

These and similar measures were only minimally effective, however, and by 1934 the situation had grown bleak. On 19 January 1934 Local 6’s president Walter Weber wrote to national AFM president Joseph Weber that 40 percent of the local’s 2,500 members—500 “formerly steadily employed and about the same number once partially employed”—were unable to find work.⁴² The annual payroll for theater musicians was running at about \$250,000, compared to \$1.5 million in 1928.

The crisis was not restricted to the theaters. Even in good times, the San Francisco Symphony had been waging a battle against insufficient funding.⁴³ But the orchestra’s fortunes reached a new low during the Depression. By the end of the 1920s, the symphony season had featured thirteen subscription concerts; eleven

³⁸ Joseph N. Weber, “The ‘Talkie’ Situation” (a letter to all AFM locals, 4 January 1929), *The Musical News* 12/1 (15 January 1929): 1–2.

³⁹ In Chicago, for example, two thousand musicians had been employed in theaters prior to sound films; by the mid-1930s only 125 jobs remained. See “Coping with Automation: The Musicians,” *Business Week*, 9 June 1956, repr. in *Unions and Union Leadership, Their Human Meaning*, ed. Jack Barbash, 306–11 (New York: Harper, 1959); and Leiter, *Musicians and Petrillo*, 47–48.

⁴⁰ “Orchestra of 200 Billed for Benefit,” *Chronicle*, 29 November 1931, D3.

⁴¹ “M’Donald Fund Aided by Chief of S.F. Utility; Musicians’ Union Lends Support to Benefit on September 18,” *Chronicle*, 9 September 1933, 3. See also Joseph Weber, “Living Music Day,” *International Musician*, February 1932, 1. Some of these issues are discussed by Robin Kelley in “Without a Song: New York Musicians Strike Out Against Technology,” in Howard Zinn, Dana Frank, and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Three Strikes: Miners, Musicians, Salesgirls, and the Fighting Spirit of Labor’s Last Century*, 119–55 (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). Though lacking some source references and giving an incorrect date of 1900 for the founding of the AFM, the article gives valuable information on Local 802’s futile battle with the theaters in New York in 1936–37.

⁴² “Appeal for National and State Relief for Unemployed Musicians,” *The Musical News* 17/2 (February 1934): 1, 10–11.

⁴³ The letters of Alfred Hertz, who conducted the orchestra from 1915 to 1930, are filled with pleas for money for players, soloists, music rental, etc. (Information from Hertz’s correspondence, San Francisco Public Library, Hertz Papers.)

pops concerts; run-out concerts in Berkeley, Oakland, and Stanford; a ten-concert summer season; and a high-profile municipal series co-sponsored by the city. By contrast the 1932–34 seasons were reduced to seven subscription performances, five municipal programs, and a severely curtailed summer series.⁴⁴ Even with these cutbacks, matters got worse. In 1934–35, the entire season was cancelled, prompting a “Save Our Symphony” (S.O.S.) campaign that culminated in voter approval of a city property tax to support the orchestra.⁴⁵

By 1934 the payroll for Local 6's membership was about half its normal level. After four years of unemployment, some of the musicians were taking Civil Works Administration (CWA) jobs “with picks and shovels” and local president Walter Weber appealed to the AFM—as well as to Mayor Angelo Rossi and Governor James Rolph—for funding from the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA).⁴⁶

If economic conditions for whites were dismal, those for blacks were worse. As Albert Broussard states: “Confined primarily to semiskilled and unskilled labor, domestic, and personal service jobs, most black workers had no protection or security whatsoever in a depressed economy. . . . Blacks had the highest rate of unemployment, the highest percentage of temporary workers in the labor force, and the fewest opportunities to enter the work force as permanent workers.”⁴⁷ In 1934, a study by the Joint Committee on National Recovery reported that black workers in five metropolitan areas had lost their jobs at twice the rate of whites.⁴⁸ In the Bay Area alone, three times as many African Americans were unemployed in 1937 as in 1930.⁴⁹ During the debate on the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, Congress even considered sanctioning lower wages for blacks than whites. Proponents of such discrimination used the prevailing lower wage scale for blacks as an argument for maintaining the status quo: they claimed that black workers were less efficient than whites and only obtained work because of their willingness to accept lower pay. Therefore mandating equal wages would actually exacerbate black unemployment. Although Congress ultimately refused to accede to such racist arguments, it did leave loopholes such as granting companies the right to

⁴⁴ Data compiled from a detailed examination of the symphony's programs.

⁴⁵ Passed by a 64 percent margin on 2 May 1935, the tax assessed property owners a half-cent per \$100 assessed valuation. The *Chronicle* urged passage (editorial 22 April, 10; article by Alfred Frankenstein, 28 April, D3; and voting recommendations, 29 April, 13, and 1 May, 1), as did the mayor and the union. An excellent summary of the activities supporting the campaign, and the vital role played by Local 6, is given in the “Report of Campaign for Charter Amendment Number 3, ‘Save Our Symphony,’” *The Musical News* 18/6 (June 1935): 2–3, 5–7. The symphony began performing again in January 1936 under Pierre Monteux.

⁴⁶ CWA funds were nominally restricted to construction projects, though some allotments had been made to musicians. SERA funds were unrestricted and could be allocated by the state for any employment project (“Appeal for National and State Relief”). In June 1934, Kajetan Attl, the symphony's harpist and the Supervisor for Musicians' Relief, reported that between 15 May and 2 June ninety-one SERA applicants had been placed on relief and the program had room for seventeen more. Kajetan Attl, “S.E.R.A.,” *The Musical News* 17/6 (June 1934): 15.

⁴⁷ Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 113.

⁴⁸ “Negroes Hit Twice as Hard as Whites by the Depression, Report Shows,” *The Spokesman*, 4 October 1934, 5. The cities studied were Atlanta, Indianapolis, Richmond, Newark, Charlotte, and Columbus.

⁴⁹ Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 115–17.

classify types of work, “thus completely exempting some blacks from coverage while placing the remainder in the lowest possible classification.”⁵⁰ Even the Federal Music Project, under director Nikolai Sokoloff, put blacks at a disadvantage. Though the FMP sponsored a half-million performances and at its peak in 1936 employed more than 15,000 musicians, it privileged symphonic music and opera, and sanctioned racially segregated ensembles (some of which nevertheless proved very successful, such as Elmer Keeton’s Oakland chorus).⁵¹

One of the most bitter labor disputes in this period involved the ports along the Pacific Coast. The battle—which eventually embraced all union workers in San Francisco, including the musicians—became particularly brutal in 1934, the same year in which the struggle between Locals 6 and 648 reached head-on conflict. In May 1934, longshoremen from San Pedro to Seattle walked off the job, demanding higher wages, improved working conditions, and a closed shop. Sympathetic strikes by seamen and teamsters brought the shipping industry to a virtual standstill, and the companies (typically) turned to African American strikebreakers. “Bricks Fly as 500 Longshoremen Attack Oakland Scabs,” cried San Francisco’s black newspaper *The Spokesman* during the second week of the strike. The editorial staff fumed at the plight of black workers:

If they work, they are traitors to labor; if they remain idle, they are traitors to their stomachs Union labor never seems to need the loyalty of Aframerican workers until it calls a strike. As long as the unions are getting what they want, any person darker than a sunburned Swede is blackballed the moment he sticks his head in the meeting room. But when the union boys want to wrest a few extra hours or dollars from the “bosses,” the atmosphere becomes thick with mellow friendship, warm invitations, and loud hurrahs for “our black brothers.”⁵²

In early July, the industry’s attempts to forcibly open San Francisco’s ports led to rioting and, on 5 July, the death of a striker and a strike sympathizer at the hands of the police. The violence crystallized pro-union sympathy. On 9 July, a funeral parade for the dead men drew 40,000 mourners. Three days later teamsters, butchers, railway employees, and others stayed off their jobs. Other unions followed and, on 16 July, 127,000 workers stayed home, marking the beginning of a three-day general strike.⁵³ Local 6 acted in consort with its labor colleagues. Members were

⁵⁰ William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 104–5. See also Foner, *Organized Labor*, 200–201.

⁵¹ On the history of this group, see Michael Fried, “W. Elmer Keeton and His WPA Chorus: Oakland’s Musical Civil Rights Pioneers of the New Deal Era,” *California History* 75/3 (Fall 1996): 236–49. For one assessment of the FMP’s activities in California, see Catherine Parsons Smith, *Transforming the Popular: Music Making, Concert Life, and Opera in Los Angeles, 1887–1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming), chapter 15.

⁵² “Bricks Fly as 500 Longshoremen Attack Oakland Scabs,” *The Spokesman*, 17 May 1934, 1.

⁵³ For information on the strike, see *San Francisco: The Bay and its Cities*, compiled by the Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration of Northern California (New York: Hastings House, 1947); Felix Riesenber, Jr., *Golden Gate: The Story of San Francisco Harbor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940); and Mike Quin, *The Big Strike* (Olema, Calif.: Olema Publishing Company, 1949). Michael Denning considers 1934 a turning point in US labor history, citing not only the general strike in San Francisco but also strikes by teamsters in Minneapolis and auto parts workers in Toledo. See Denning, *The Cultural Front*, xiv, 22.

ordered off the job at the end of their engagements on 15 July and were prohibited from accepting any work except religious services for the duration of the strike. Five members of the local attended all sessions of the General Strike Committee. One of them, secretary Eddie B. Love (who will figure prominently in our story), was appointed to its executive committee.⁵⁴

This uproar—in addition to (temporarily) settling the long-simmering conflict at the ports—had some positive effects on race relations. Harry Bridges, charismatic leader of the longshoremen, spoke out strongly in favor of integration, leading *The Spokesman* to claim he had “struck the shackles that have kept black and white labor alike chained to the chariot wheels of the privileged classes.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately, no such proposal was advanced in the AFM.

The one bright spot in the dismal economic picture of the early 1930s was the passage (in 1933) of the Twenty-first Amendment, which repealed the Eighteenth (Prohibition). With prolonged unemployment reaching crisis levels for so many musicians, the re-legalization of alcoholic drinks offered the prospect of clubs reopening with live music—a glimmer of hope in the unemployment morass. That same hopefulness, however, led to a series of events that triggered a collision between Locals 6 and 648.

1934–35: Confrontation

Local 6 wasted little time after the repeal of prohibition to begin enforcing wage standards in San Francisco's nightclubs. Even before the national ratification process was completed on 5 December 1933, its board of directors engaged in lengthy discussions about prices and classification.⁵⁶ A committee headed by Eddie Love (who had been elected secretary at the beginning of the year) took on the job of enforcing the new wages in the hundreds of clubs springing up in the city. For thirteen years, Love reflected later, “a branch of our business, namely, the Night Clubs . . . was allowed to flourish like a weed with the result that when the New Deal permitted light wines and beers, and the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment began to appear as a reality, a tremendous task confronted your [Local 6] officers.”⁵⁷ Secretary Love—brash, energetic, and unafraid of confrontation—attacked this job with gusto; in his words, committee members “slept, drank and ate Night Clubs and Speaks for . . . eighteen months.” Their contention was that since these establishments were now legitimate businesses they “must be prepared to recognize

⁵⁴ Local 6 board meetings of 14 and 16 July (*The Musical News* 18/8 [August 1934]: 12–13); and Clarence H. King, “Report of the Delegates of General Strike Committee,” *The Musical News* 18/8 (August 1934): 1, 6.

⁵⁵ “I.L.A. Pledges Open Door to Negro Worker,” *The Spokesman*, 9 August 1934, 1. In 1937, Bridges and the Pacific Coast ILA broke with the AFL and joined the CIO as the ILWA (International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union).

⁵⁶ The minutes from October and November record detailed discussions of wage rates. Second-class clubs, for example, were set at \$35 per week, equivalent to \$545 in 2006. Congress passed the Twenty-first Amendment on 20 February 1933, but ratification by the states took until December.

⁵⁷ Eddie B. Love, “The Bubble Bursts,” *The Musical News* 18/12 (December 1934): 1–2.

legitimate competition, be content with legitimate profits, operate along legitimate lines, [and] pay their employees legitimate wages.”⁵⁸

The club owners did not necessarily agree. When the managers “went up in arms and threatened wholesale reprisals,” Local 6 telegraphed the AFM. In response, national president Joseph Weber put all clubs and speakeasies “of any consequence” in the San Francisco area on the “forbidden territory” list,⁵⁹ an effective means of protecting local jobs. The list targeted employers who undercut union scale: forbidden territory establishments were required to hire only members of the local union. Those who violated this restriction faced boycotts not only from the musicians’ union but also from “sympathetic” labor organizations, thus threatening their ability to stay in business. The criteria in 1934 were extremely broad:

Any establishment . . . may be placed on the forbidden territory list . . . if the American Federation of Musicians has information that the owner or manager of such establishment . . . has caused . . . or intends to cause members of the Federation to accept or play engagements . . . in violation of any rule of the American Federation of Musicians. Musicians for . . . any establishment . . . on such forbidden territory list can only be employed through the local union in whose jurisdiction their services are to be rendered.⁶⁰

The problem, of course, was that San Francisco had *two* local unions—6 and 648—with jurisdiction over the same territory. By the following year, the forbidden territory provision had been rewritten, possibly in response to the San Francisco court battle that erupted in 1934. Wage issues and traveling bands were now highlighted, “union” was changed to “unions,” and “one local” [read “colored”] was forbidden from undercutting another in the same jurisdiction.

If . . . evidence satisfactory to the Federation is submitted which discloses that an employer attempted to induce a contracting member . . . of a Local to accept less than the price of an engagement and while making such attempt threatens to engage a traveling orchestra . . . the Federation shall have the right to declare such employer and his establishment forbidden territory. Musicians for or on behalf of any such establishment . . . can only be employed through the local unions in whose jurisdiction their services are to be rendered.

NOTE: Nothing in this section can be so construed that an employer in a jurisdiction in which two unions are maintained could use the members of one union to the detriment of the other.⁶¹

Normally foreign territory restrictions were imposed on a case-by-case basis. Had Local 6 used this approach, the conflict with 648 might not have escalated into full-scale war. But the AFM president’s ruling not only set up Local 6 as the predominant union in the area but also cast a blanket restriction over the entire

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ed S. Moore, “The End of the War and The State of the Union (Local 6),” *The Musical News* 28/9 (September 1945): 3, 5.

⁶⁰ AFM Constitution and By-Laws, 1934, 133 (art. XIII, sec. 18, par. 3). San Francisco was by no means the only city to use the forbidden territory clause as a way of closing out competition by black locals. See, for example, Keller, “Seattle’s Segregated Musicians’ Union,” 91.

⁶¹ AFM Constitution and By-Laws 1935, 138–39 (art. XIII, sec. 18, par. 5). According to Lew Mancini, assistant to the AFM president, some form of this clause appeared in the bylaws until 1981.

region. Beginning in February 1934, the following announcement appeared every month in Local 6's *Musical News*:

Forbidden Territory List: All speakeasies and night clubs in the jurisdiction of Local No. 6, San Francisco, Calif., are declared Forbidden Territory to all members of the A. F. of M. other than members of Local No. 6. [Signed]: Jos. N. Weber, President, A. F. of M.⁶²

This move by Local 6 aimed to improve the employment situation for its members, but it also effectively eliminated competition from Local 648. While 648 tried to maintain cordial relations with 6 (which was about five times its size),⁶³ Eddie Love and his Night Club Committee were on the lookout for black musicians playing with nonunion colleagues or at rates below those of the white local. In December 1933, for example, Local 6's board ordered "charges preferred in the colored local against its member Charles W. Strather for working with non-members at the California Tavern in Oakland." Strather was secretary of 648. Two weeks later, the business agent of Local 6 was "instructed to prefer charges with the American Federation of Musicians against Local No. 648 (colored) of Oakland, for their unfair activities in the Capitol Theatre." And most tellingly, in April 1934 a Local 6 member requested a reduction in scale for a gig in the East Bay; otherwise, he warned, the "operators will put in colored orchestra." In response, the Local 6 board had the Alameda Walk-A-Way Derby cited individually on the forbidden territory list and "notified the President of Local 648 to that effect."⁶⁴

On the other hand, club owners, many of whom had invested considerable sums in renovating facilities and purchasing liquor and dancing licenses, were interested in keeping entertainment costs down. One way to cut expenses was to employ African American musicians—whose bands attracted enthusiastic audiences—at lower rates. To a significant extent, then, the lack of racial barriers in San Francisco in this period actually exacerbated the conflict by bringing black musicians into direct competition with whites for jobs in the same venues.

The small size of San Francisco's black population also increased the competition for jobs. African American musicians had little choice but to vie for the same jobs as whites, unlike their counterparts in cities such as Chicago, where an active and prominent black music scene had already been established by the 1930s.⁶⁵ It was not until World War II that San Francisco's African American population reached the critical mass needed to establish a thriving independent club culture challenging that of the downtown area. The 1930 census registered only 3,803 African Americans

⁶² The forbidden territory notices for all clubs in the Local 6 jurisdiction appeared in *The Musical News* every month until 1944, when the breadth of this ruling was challenged by a Los Angeles booking agent and the blanket restriction was revoked. See the board minutes of 22 June 1944 (*The Musical News* 27/8 [August 1944]: 3); and 18 and 21 July 1944 (*The Musical News* 27/9 [September 1944]: 2 and 7). Local 6's protests against the revocation were rejected. See also Moore, "End of the War."

⁶³ For instance, Local 648 ran a "Season's Greetings" ad in *The Musical News* every January.

⁶⁴ Strather case: board meeting of 12 December 1933 (*The Musical News* 17/1 [January 1934]: 20); Capitol Theater case: board meeting of 27 December 1933 (*The Musical News* 17/1 [January 1934]: 26); Alameda Walk-A-Way Derby case: board meetings of 24 and 26 April 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/6 [June 1934]: 7–8).

⁶⁵ See, for example, William Howland Kenney, *Chicago Jazz: A Cultural History 1904–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

in San Francisco, out of a total urban population of 594,969 (0.6 percent), less than a quarter the size of the largest ethnic minority, the Chinese (16,303). In comparison, there were twice as many blacks in Oakland and ten times as many in Los Angeles, even though the total population of L.A. was less than double that of San Francisco. Discrimination in San Francisco was certainly present. Broussard cites, as one of several examples, the overwhelming obstacles faced by African American attorneys and physicians; blacks were also closed out of employment in certain arenas.⁶⁶ Compared to many other regions of the country, however, San Francisco was quite tolerant. Broussard notes that by 1900 most of the city's segregation laws had been abolished and that incidents of interracial violence were rare.⁶⁷

In the classical music field, a number of African American artists attracted enthusiastic responses from predominantly white audiences during the 1930s. On 5 March 1933, for example, tenor George Garner received a warm welcome by a large audience at the Community Playhouse,⁶⁸ a venue for numerous recitals as well as several of Henry Cowell's avant-garde New Music Society concerts. On 29 December of the same year three thousand fans braved the pouring rain to hear tenor Roland Hayes perform at War Memorial Opera House with the San Francisco Symphony. Critic Alfred Metzger wrote a feature article and an outstanding review.⁶⁹ In 1937, Marian Anderson made her San Francisco debut with solo recitals in the city and in Oakland, as well as performances with Pierre Monteux and the Symphony. Her appearance was heralded by extraordinary hype in the local press, and her singing was greeted with enthusiastic ovations and capacity crowds. The *Chronicle* noted that she "electrified a capacity audience" in her initial recital at the 3,200-seat opera house.⁷⁰ Anderson returned to San Francisco annually for several years.

Before World War II "no rigidly segregated Negro community existed" in San Francisco.⁷¹ Nevertheless, many members of the tightly knit black minority lived in the Western Addition (see Figure 1), a multiethnic region composed mostly of working-class families. Jazz drummer Earl Watkins (b. 1920; Figure 2), who grew up in this district, remembers the city of the 1930s as lively and open. "We'd ride the Muni up and down Market Street, enjoying shopping in all the stores," he recalled. At the same time, the proud black population was careful to maintain an image of

⁶⁶ Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 52–54. Drummer Eddie Alley recalled difficulty finding jobs on street cars or in department stores. See Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts, *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), 35.

⁶⁷ Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 2.

⁶⁸ In addition to an extensive preview article and brief review in *The Spokesman* (2 March, 1; and 9 March, 1), the *Chronicle* ran a small concert announcement (4 March, 16) and a strong review by Alfred Frankenstein (6 March, 5). Garner was touted as the first black singer to appear at the Chicago Opera House.

⁶⁹ Alfred Metzger, "Roland Hayes Tolerant of Music Ideas," *Chronicle*, 29 December 1933, 17; and "Throng Braves Rain to Hear Roland Hayes," *Chronicle*, 30 December 1933, 24. Metzger was editor of the *Pacific Coast Musical Review*.

⁷⁰ Anderson's 1937 appearance is discussed in the *Chronicle* on 14 February, D5; 21 February, D5; 24 February, 9; 25 February, 13; 28 February, D5; 1 March, 28; 3 March, 15; 5 March, 20 and 36; and 6 March, 11. The specific quote is from the article of 3 March.

⁷¹ Charles Johnson, *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1944), 3, quoted in Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 99.

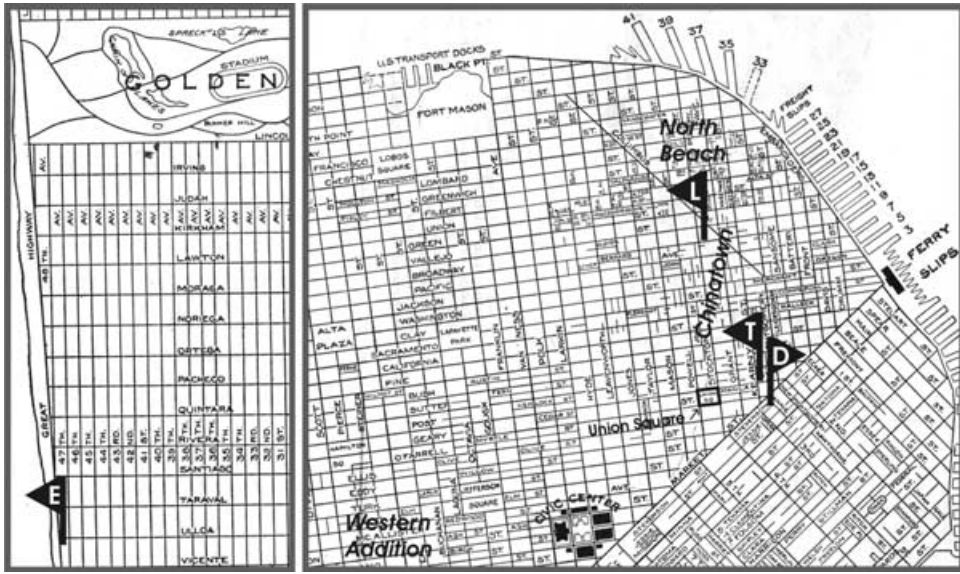


FIGURE 1. San Francisco in the 1930s: D = Dawn Club, E = Edgewater Cafe, L = Liberty Theater, T = Tip Top Club.



FIGURE 2. Earl Watkins, 1947 (photographer unknown).



FIGURE 3. Left to right, Vernon Alley, Bob Barfield, Wilbert Baranco, 1938–39 (photographer unknown).

respectability. “We had to behave,” says Watkins. “Because anywhere we went, there were members of our community; and if we acted up, our parents soon knew about it!”⁷²

Though white club owners and patrons welcomed black bands (some of whom came across the bay by ferry from Oakland), Local 6’s forbidden territory restriction increasingly squeezed them out of job opportunities. Local 648 didn’t take the actions of Eddie Love’s committee lying down. It appealed—apparently repeatedly—to the International. In April 1934, Local 6 received a communication “from President Joe N. Weber enclosing a protest of Local 648 against forbidden territory in speakeasies and night clubs together with his reply thereto.” Unfortunately this “reply” is not detailed, but later that year the black press noted that 648’s “repeated wires and letters to national headquarters” had met with silence or references to Local 6. On the other hand, when Local 6 charged 648 with “inept maintenance” the following month, it received word from the AFM that the “matter will be immediately taken up by Federation.”⁷³

In late July or early August 1934, Bud Fisher, owner of the Tip Top Club, hired a black band composed of members of Local 648. The club was located at 130 Kearny Street, an upscale area near Union Square—today one of San Francisco’s ritziest shopping districts (see Figure 1). Nevertheless, it had reputedly lost \$4,200 with the “Nordic” bands it previously featured.⁷⁴ An ad in the *Chronicle* on August 11, aimed at a Legionnaires’ convention, heralded the new black entertainers led by pianist Wilbert Baranco (Figure 3) as coming “direct from the Grand Terrace Gardens,

⁷² Watkins, telephone interview with the author, 27 August 2006.

⁷³ Board meeting of 17 April 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/6 [June 1934]: 2); “Coast Musicians Sue White Local,” *Chicago Defender*, 22 September 1934, 7; and board meeting of 22 May 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/6 [June 1934]: 12). *The Spokesman* claimed that 648’s secretary John Terrell had written “at least a dozen letters” and received no answer. “Bi-Union Discrimination Case Set for Tue.: Showdown Court Trial Follows Music Union’s Attempt to Jim-Crow Bay Area,” 30 August 1934, 2.

⁷⁴ “Oakland Musicians Go to Law When Nordic Group ‘Hogs’ Good Jobs,” *The Spokesman*, 30 August 1934, 1; and “Bi-Union Discrimination Case.”

Chicago.”⁷⁵ One night in mid-August, Baranco and his band showed up for work to find police at the door. They were told their services were no longer needed. Indeed, Local 6 had registered a protest with the International and president Weber had responded by “advising that members of Local No. 648 who accepted engagement at Tip Top Club have terminated their membership in the Federation by doing so.”⁷⁶ Eddie Love admitted to a reporter from *The Spokesman* that he and his committee were instrumental in having Baranco’s group discharged. He claimed they had taken the job at a wage below (Local 6’s) scale. Owner Fisher was understandably bitter; he was forced to vacate his lease and vowed to open another club with “the same colored orchestra.”⁷⁷ By September the Tip Top Club was under new management and advertised a band from Local 6 led by Don Regan.⁷⁸

Byron “Speed” Reilly, who wrote a weekly “Star Stuff” column in *The Spokesman*, reported the incident on 23 August, noting that “the boys have asked my support . . . in the FIGHT.” Reilly fumed that members of Local 6 “are said to have approached the owner and when he refused to discharge the sepia ork . . . , he was warned that he would ‘make a change or else . . .’ Incident after incident can be recited regarding the attitude Local No. 6 and white bands have taken whenever it looked as though a Negro band were about to land a good job.” Reilly claimed he was warned to go easy to avoid trouble with Local 6, since he contracted “more bands than any other one individual around here If that’s the ‘fight’ in my effort to secure justice and equal rights for some 50 Negro musicians,” he added, “I’m ready for the front line trenches.”⁷⁹

Close on the heels of this incident, a similar situation arose at the Liberty Theater, located on the edge of Chinatown (see Figure 1). A band led by Wade Whaley (a board member of 648) was dismissed four days after beginning work; two weeks’ notice was required by union rules. *The Spokesman* reported that “the manager of the theater was very indignant and . . . that persons affiliated with the white union told him, ‘Get those N—rs out of here or your place will be closed.’”⁸⁰

The Whaley band’s dismissal pushed the growing conflict into pitched battle. On 24 August Lester Robinson (a member of the band) and three other musicians from Local 648 filed for an injunction against Local 6 in San Francisco Superior Court. Five days later a summons was served on its officers and an Order to Show Cause was filed. (An Order to Show Cause requests interim relief. In this case, the plaintiffs demanded that Local 6 cease “interfering with [their] performances.”)⁸¹

⁷⁵ “Legionnaires: Here’s Your Sure Guide to the City’s Night Life,” *Chronicle*, 11 August 1934, 10.

⁷⁶ Board meeting of 7 August 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/9 [September 1934]: 2).

⁷⁷ “Oakland Musicians Go to Law” and “Bi-Union Discrimination Case,” *The Spokesman*.

⁷⁸ “Tip Top Club Features Music,” *Chronicle*, 20 September 1934, 14, and ad on the same page. The minutes of the Local 6 board meeting of 11 September state that “Don Regan is granted permission to contract for the engagement at Tip Top Club with five men commencing September 15.” *The Musical News* 17/10 (October 1934): 8.

⁷⁹ Byron “Speed” Reilly, “Star Stuff: News of Stage, Screen and Radio,” *The Spokesman*, 23 August 1934, 2.

⁸⁰ “Bi-Union Discrimination Case,” *The Spokesman*.

⁸¹ “Negro Musicians Seek Court Ban,” *Chronicle*, 2 September 1934, 5. (“The Negro plaintiffs charge that the defendants are ‘arbitrarily’ seeking to bar them from playing in many cafes, night clubs

DEPARTMENT		ACTION NUMBER	NATURE OF ACTION	DATE			SERVICES RENDERED	FEE PAID
No.		252613	<i>Inspection</i>	YEAR	MO.	DAY		
<i>Lester Robinson et al</i>	<i>vs</i>		<i>A. Mooslin</i> Attorney for Plaintiff	<i>1934</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Opp. 6. 2. 21,</i> <i>Opp. 5. 2. 21,</i> <i>Opp. 2. 22.</i>	<i>7.-</i>
<i>Walter Weber</i>			<i>Dunne & Dunne</i> Attorney for Defendant					
DATE				DATE				
<i>Aug 24</i>	<i>Complaint filed Lums. Essie</i>			<i>1934</i>				
<i>24</i>	<i>Summons with affidav. of service</i>			<i>Aug 24</i>			<i>Order 5 days to plead</i>	
<i>24</i>	<i>o. b. King 1. 21. 24. 24. 24. 24.</i>			<i>27</i>			<i>Notice of opposing answer filed</i>	
<i>24</i>	<i>Haywood, Redig, Lums, Essie</i>			<i>13</i>			<i>Notice of sustaining demurrer filed</i>	
<i>24</i>	<i>W. H. Wood, J. B. G. 21. 24. 24. 24.</i>			<i>19</i>			<i>Demurrer amended comp. filed</i>	
<i>24</i>	<i>Order show cause filed</i>			<i>19</i>			<i>Notice of Mot. to Dismiss 2. 24. 24. 24.</i>	
<i>31</i>	<i>Copy to G. filed</i>			<i>22</i>			<i>Dismissal of action filed</i>	
<i>Sept 4</i>	<i>Recess of all depts. filed</i>			<i>27</i>			<i>Action dismissed</i>	
<i>6</i>	<i>Ord. dem. of all depts. sent 10 days</i>							
<i>6</i>	<i>to amend</i>							
<i>13</i>	<i>Amended comp. filed</i>							
<i>13</i>	<i>Plts. points & counter filed</i>							
<i>14</i>	<i>Order to show cause filed</i>							
<i>21</i>	<i>Demurrer to amend comp. filed</i>							
<i>22</i>	<i>Notice to produce filed</i>							
<i>27</i>	<i>Ord. dem. only - 10 days to answer</i>							
<i>28</i>	<i>Not. of Mot. to vacate order filed</i>							
<i>28</i>	<i>Order of G. H. Lums filed</i>							
<i>28</i>	<i>Order of G. H. Lums filed</i>							
<i>Oct 2</i>	<i>Ord. under working</i>							
<i>2</i>	<i>Damn to Amended</i>							
<i>2</i>	<i>Complaint set aside</i>							
<i>2</i>	<i>Ord. Dam to Amended</i>							
<i>2</i>	<i>Complaint set aside 5 days to answer</i>							

FIGURE 4. San Francisco Superior Court Record of Action, case no. 252613, 1934.

Unfortunately, transcripts from this period were destroyed decades ago by the court, but the Record of Action survives, shown in Figure 4.⁸² This document, in tandem with reports in the black press, allows us to reconstruct the legal battle. The black plaintiffs secured the services of a well-respected attorney, Alexander Mooslin, who had been featured during the previous two decades in several newspaper articles on leading members of the bar.⁸³ Local 6 pulled out the big guns, hiring the firm of Dunne and Dunne, one of whose named partners, Harvard-educated Arthur B. Dunne, later became president of the San Francisco Bar Association.⁸⁴ On 28 August,

and theaters.”) I would particularly like to thank Dennis Caspe for helping me to interpret the court records.

⁸² Superior Court Record of Action 252,613; the case number has since been reassigned to a divorce case from the 1990s. All records below 370,000 were destroyed except for probate cases.

⁸³ “Biographical Sketches of Leaders in Professional and Official Fields Tell of Genuine Achievements,” *Chronicle*, 16 January 1918, 46; and “City’s Bench and Bar Boast Great Traditions,” *Chronicle*, 18 January 1922, 45. A “self-made man,” Mooslin was educated at Hastings College of Law in San Francisco and Kent Law School in Chicago. He was a boxer as well as a lawyer and had a “large general law practice.”

⁸⁴ The two Dunnes in the firm name were Arthur and his father Peter, who died in 1933. Arthur Dunne was editor of the *Harvard Law Review* in 1921–23, in which year he received his LLB cum laude. He became president of the San Francisco Bar Association in 1942 (information from the *Martindale-Hubbell Directory of Experts and Legal Services*, 1970).



FIGURE 5. Three Local 6 officers, 1934: Walter Weber, Eddie Love, Clarence King (photos published repeatedly in *The Musical News*, photographer unknown).

Local 6's board discussed the "action brought by members of the Colored Local in the Superior Court," which specifically named its officers: president Walter Weber, business agent Karl Dietrich, vice president Jack Haywood, treasurer Clarence King, and secretary Eddie Love (see Figure 4, lines 2–5, and Figure 5). Dietrich phoned national AFM president Joseph Weber, who in turn called 648's secretary John H. Terrell. Weber warned Terrell that if the court case proceeded before all internal remedies were exhausted, the members involved would be expelled from the union. More ominously, he said that 648 risked losing its charter. At a meeting of the black local, however, members voted to proceed despite these threats. When Local 6 officers called Mooslin's office they learned that Secretary Terrell had been present when the court papers were completed, thereby giving official sanction to the lawsuit. The board instructed Eddie Love to file a formal grievance with the Federation.⁸⁵

Apparently, the members of the black local had reason to expect a sympathetic hearing from the court. Mooslin was well known, having served as an assistant district attorney and secretary of the West of Van Ness Avenue Improvement Association. Judge Louis Ward also proved receptive to their arguments: by the end of the month he signaled his intention to rule in their favor. At the initial hearing on 4 September, however, the judge was forced to sustain the demurrer of the defendants when Mooslin sought a restraining order that would apply to all jobs under Local 6's jurisdiction. (A demurrer is basically a legal "So what?": it acknowledges that the allegations are true but asserts that they are insufficient to sustain the claim.) Nevertheless, the judge allowed ten days for an amended complaint and, according to *The Spokesman*, told the white union that "unless they proved, when the case is heard again . . . , that they have not interfered illegally with the hiring of Negro musicians, in the Bay district, he will issue a court order COMPELLING them to keep hands off managers of theaters, restaurants, hotels, and nite spots using Negro

⁸⁵ Board meeting of 28 August 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/9 [September 1934]: 10–11) and "Bi-Union Discrimination Case," *The Spokesman*.

orchestras.”⁸⁶ The court took testimony from John Casey of the Liberty Theater, who said he was threatened with having his stagehands, projectionists, and other union employees walk out unless he fired Whaley’s band; and from Mimi Imperato, a flamboyant impresario and restaurant owner who said that he was forced to fire the band Ennis and his Gang.

The case made headlines in black papers outside San Francisco. The *California Eagle* in Los Angeles ran a lengthy article under a banner head (“White Unions Hit for Discrimination by Judge”) and the *Chicago Defender* highlighted Local 6’s success in enlisting the help of the police:

Testimony was introduced at the hearing showing that for a number of months past a systematic campaign has been carried on by members of the white union to keep all Race musicians from playing in San Francisco in any night club, speakeasy, hotel, cabaret, theatre, in fact in any place where a living might be made by members of the Race union. Repeated wires and letters to national headquarters have been met with either a reference to Local 6 or with stony silence. . . . It is also currently reported that . . . the white local is using its purposed [*sic*; purported?] influence with the police department by having the local police harass such places whose operators cannot entirely stand before the law or whose places are a trifle shady. . . . The business agent of Local 6 called and informed the operators [of the Tip Top Club] they would have to get rid of the Negro musicians. The operators demurred, as they were having good crowds and making money, whereupon, it is reported, the police became suddenly active and began to crack down on the place, imposing such restrictions as to make it impossible for the club to continue.⁸⁷

The *Eagle* reported that Local 6’s attorney offered no testimony, but in a “long-winded address” accused 648 of “chiseling and working outside union scale.” Furthermore, the defense alleged that 648 was under the “watch care” of Local 6, an argument reminiscent of Joseph Weber’s 1928 ruling regarding the supervisory privileges of the white union in Seattle. The Local 6 board minutes paint a rather different picture, noting only that the judge sustained the demurrer “entered by our attorneys” and granted Mooslin ten days to amend the complaint.⁸⁸

On Thursday, 27 September, Judge Ward ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, overruling the defense’s demurrer to the amended complaint and giving the white union’s lawyers ten days to answer. Dunne and Dunne immediately submitted a motion to vacate, as well as several affidavits.

This is where matters stood when the American Federation of Labor opened its fifty-fourth convention in San Francisco on 1 October. Civil rights leader William Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, chose this venue to mount a heated challenge to the AFL on its abysmal record of race relations. With support from Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, and local black attorneys Edward Mabson and Leland Hawkins, a picket line was organized: “Neatly-dressed young Negro men and women paraded back and forth before the

⁸⁶ “Court Bares Threats of Musicians: White Musician’s Union Accused of Intimidation, Lose First Court Tilt,” *The Spokesman*, 6 September 1934, 1.

⁸⁷ “Coast Musicians Sue White Local,” *Chicago Defender*.

⁸⁸ “White Unions Hit for Discrimination by Judge,” *California Eagle*, 21 September 1934, 2; “Court Bares Threats,” *The Spokesman*; and Local 6 board meeting of 7 September 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/10 [October 1934]: 6).

Whitcomb Hotel," where the delegates were housed, and at the doors of the civic auditorium, where two thousand attendees "were applauding idealistic utterances."⁸⁹ The picketing—which seems to have been invisible to the white press—was hailed by the black papers as a "bold and dramatic stroke" that was "unprecedented in the history of A. F. of L. conventions." Members of Local 648 were not present, however, apparently proceeding with "excessive caution" lest they jeopardize their recent advances in court.⁹⁰ Randolph introduced to the AFL convention five resolutions dealing with black workers, one of which demanded expulsion of unions with "whites only" clauses in their constitutions or rituals and the appointment of a committee to study the plight of African American union workers.⁹¹ Despite an impassioned defense by Randolph, the expulsion demand was rejected (the familiar argument: the AFL could not interfere with the workings of its member unions), but the convention supported the appointment of an investigative committee, which was to report back to the 1935 convention. AFL president William Green eventually appointed a "Committee of Five"—all whites—which conducted hearings in various locations and issued a report urging immediate action to counteract discrimination. But this report never reached the delegates. In 1935, a substitute version prepared by George M. Harrison, president of the historically racist Brotherhood of Railway Clerks, was presented instead. It failed to mention Green's committee or its recommendations. Randolph's demands to recognize the original report were rejected. The same 1935 convention witnessed a physical confrontation between John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers, and William Hutcheson, head of the carpenter's union, over the issue of industrial vs. craft organization. The AFL delegates voted to continue their craft structure, thereby effectively expelling those unions interested in industrial organization. The rebels, led by Lewis, formed the rival CIO, which courted black workers.⁹²

Meanwhile, actions in the Superior Court continued on 2 and 4 October, with Judge Ward overruling one demurrer, sustaining another, and giving Mooslin still a third opportunity to amend his complaint. Just as matters were moving in favor of the plaintiffs, however, the case took a surprising turn: the black musicians withdrew their action and on 22 October the case was dismissed with no ruling (see Figure 4).

⁸⁹ "NAACP Pickets A. F. of L. Convention," *The Spokesman*, 4 October 1934, 1.

⁹⁰ "Our Local Stalwarts," *The Spokesman*, 12 October 1934, 6; "Race Workers Picket Labor Meeting in San Francisco," *Chicago Defender*, 13 October 1934, 4; and "Musicians Balk at Picket Job," *The Spokesman*, 4 October 1934, 1.

⁹¹ Resolution 141; see the AFL *Proceedings* of 1934, 254–55, 330–34. The other resolutions (a) opposed wage differentials for blacks and whites; (b) opposed lynching and supported the Costigan-Wagner Federal Anti-Lynching Bill; (c) requested approval of an international charter for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and (d) requested appointment of one or more African American labor organizers.

⁹² This series of events has been discussed in many sources; see, for example, Harris, *The Harder We Run*, chap. 4, esp. 89–91; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, vol. 1, *The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), chap. 7; and Foner, *Organized Labor*, 204–12. Hutcheson's name is misspelled as Hutchinson in some of these sources.

We can only speculate on what occasioned this unexpected move. AFM president Joseph Weber, who was one of eight vice presidents of the AFL, was attending the San Francisco labor convention: he might well have applied pressure on 648 in phone conversations or personal meetings. No such interaction is recorded in Local 6's minutes, however, which merely report a communication from Dunne and Dunne "advising plaintiff had dismissed the case."⁹³ *The Spokesman's* reporter speculated that Local 648 feared the loss of its charter.⁹⁴

A week after the court case was dropped, Local 648's secretary Terrell—in an apparent attempt to make peace—appeared at the Local 6 board meeting "re supervising all steady engagements where their members play."⁹⁵ The minutes record the matter as deferred to 2 November, but this delay may have been a ruse to disguise another, more insidious action, in progress. On 13 November, two weeks after Terrell appeared before the board, a communication from national secretary Kerngood was read: "The International Executive Board [IEB] has found Local 648, Oakland, California, guilty of the complaint of this Local [6] and its charter has been revoked."⁹⁶

The IEB minutes do not register this decision; the case—recorded in the docket of 1935 as No. 75—was probably handled by a subcommittee. A follow-up article in *The Spokesman* stated that the complaint, filed by Eddie Love, was not based on the lawsuit. Rather he asserted "that conditions of working, rates of pay, and punishment of its members for infractions of rules by Local 648 are not in accordance with union orders."⁹⁷ Despite Love's denial, it's hard to believe that the legal battle was coincidental to Local 6's efforts to have 648 disenfranchised. Nor is it likely that Joseph Weber, in revoking 648's charter, was unaffected by his recent interactions with San Francisco's black musicians. He also proved deaf to their protests: Local 648 filed a response, "but no reply was received other than the demand for their charter."

Local 6, after all, was quite powerful; one of its members, Albert Greenbaum, even sat on the nine-member IEB. Joseph Weber, for his part, was under considerable pressure to find work for unemployed musicians and bring wages back to pre-Depression levels, making him loath to ignore a complaint by one of his influential locals.

Despite the loss of their charter, African American musicians continued to play in San Francisco clubs. Baranco, notes a December article in *The Spokesman*, was

⁹³ Board meeting of 30 October 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/12 [December 1934]: 7).

⁹⁴ "Union Musicians Drop Job Suit," *The Spokesman*, 12 October 1934, 1. The timing of this article is curious, as several more court actions are registered in the Record of Action before the dismissal on 22 October. The article reports that "the musicians of Local 648, through their attorney, A. Mooslin, announced the withdrawal of their petition for an injunction to prevent musicians of white local 6 from closing them out of lucrative jobs in the bay district. . . . From authoritative sources, it is learned that a local appealing to a civil court from the decisions of the national body is subject to loss of charter. This, it is believed, is the reason for the sudden dropping of the present case from the calendar."

⁹⁵ Board meeting of 30 October 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/12 [December 1934]: 7).

⁹⁶ Board meeting of 13 November 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/12 [December 1934]: 9). No discussion of the issue is recorded on 2 November.

⁹⁷ "Local Musicians May Lose Jobs as Nat. Body Revokes Union Charter," *The Spokesman*, 14 December 1934, 1.

“heading a six piece orchestra at the Dawn night club,” located on Annie Street, only a few blocks from the Tip Top Club (see Figure 1).⁹⁸ Local 6’s minutes confirm that the Dawn Club had “gone non-union” and that the place was “100 per cent colored throughout.” Owner H. LaFerne ran several cafes in San Francisco that were repeatedly picketed by various white unions. The success and expansion of his businesses, claimed *The Spokesman*, “has been possible only through the savings made by hiring Negro workers.”⁹⁹

On 7 January 1935, the IEB considered an application by the “colored residents of Oakland” for a new charter. It referred the matter to president Weber, who in turn sent it to Local 6 for comment.¹⁰⁰ Local 6’s response is not recorded, but its new president Albert Greenbaum informed fifty musicians of the former 648 that current AFM policy prohibited a new charter. Instead the AFM could offer “subsidiary” status, a move *The Spokesman* described as an “olive twig.”¹⁰¹ (Greenbaum, president of Local 6 for only one year, 1935, did not serve on the board during the legal battle. He had, however, been the organization’s secretary for more than a dozen years before Eddie Love took over in 1933, and one wonders if matters would have reached such a crisis had he continued in that role.) The “subsidiary” proposal promised some benefits: black musicians would (theoretically) receive the same wage as members of Local 6 and all forbidden territories would be open to them. On the other hand, they would pay union dues, but have no voting rights, no access to Local 6 offices, and no voice in running the organization.

The obvious alternative—simply admitting the former members of 648 to Local 6—was apparently never considered. Instead, the black musicians faced two undesirable alternatives: fighting continual turf battles with Local 6 as scabs without union affiliation, or accepting less-than-equal status within the rival organization. In the former position, they would certainly lose out to their powerful competition. As a case in point, the upscale Edgewater Beach Cafe, located on the west side of town overlooking the Pacific (see Figure 1), defied Local 6 and in March 1935 hired former 648 member Ben Watkins and his ten-piece Dixie Rhythm Boys. Though the management vowed to stand by this decision, it received threats that as many as 700 reservations would be cancelled. The (now non-union) band was fired.¹⁰² On the other hand, the subsidiary union alternative, though demeaning, at least offered the prospect of steady employment and peace within the union ranks. *The Spokesman*, despite its strong advocacy for African American rights, advised the musicians to hold their noses, accept the offer, and work for change from the inside.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Local 6 board meetings of 6 and 13 November 1934 (*The Musical News* 17/12 [December 1934]: 8 and 12); and “LaFerne Is Our Friend, Says Group,” *The Spokesman*, 22 February 1935, 1.

¹⁰⁰ AFM *Proceedings*, 1935, 26; and Local 6 board meeting of 22 January 1935 (*The Musical News* 18/1 [February 1935]: 9).

¹⁰¹ “Union Offers Olive Twig to Oak. Bandmen,” *The Spokesman*, 5 April 1935, 1.

¹⁰² “Musicians Lose Cafe Job Through Union Threat,” *The Spokesman*, 29 March 1935, 1.

¹⁰³ “Musicians Must Choose Between Jim Crow Union and Scabbing,” *The Spokesman*, 19 April 1935, 1. A similar transformation occurred in St. Louis in 1932: charges against “colored” Local 44 were found to have merit and its charter was revoked. Thereafter the black musicians became a subsidiary of white Local 2 (*International Musician*, February 1932, 3: IEB meeting of 7 January). Locals—both

“Subsidiary Local 6” was established on 15 April 1935; its officers were Charles Turner (president), Alex Forbes (secretary), and James Simpson (business agent).¹⁰⁴ Black musicians didn’t see immediate improvements in employment, however. As usual they were caught in a no-win situation: if they accepted rates below the white scale, they faced discipline from Local 6; if they charged equal rates, employers hired white bands instead. At the Dawn Club owner LaFerne fired Baranco’s band as soon as he discovered he’d have to pay Local 6 wages. Despite his previous impassioned (and seemingly genuine) professions of support, LaFerne hired a white group in their place.¹⁰⁵

The 1940s: The Birth of Local 669

The entry of the United States into World War II meant the conscription of many members of the musicians’ union. Subsidiary Local 6 was particularly hard-hit. In October 1942, secretary Al Forbes reported that thirty-four members had entered the armed forces, leaving its ranks severely depleted.¹⁰⁶ (Musicians who entered the military were required to suspend their union membership.) Wilbert Baranco and Earl Watkins joined the navy through the recruitment efforts of Chief Musician Frank Sondey, who organized the forty-five-piece St. Mary’s Naval Pre-flight Band in Moraga (east of Oakland). Out of this military band came a seventeen-piece dance band, the Rhythm Bombardiers, directed by Marshal Royal. The band included Baranco as pianist, vocalist, and musical arranger; Watkins on drums; and others who later became famous in the jazz world, such as Ernie Royal, trumpet; Jerome Richardson, John Nelson (Jackie Kelso), and Curtis Lowe, reeds; and Vernon Alley, bass (see Figure 3).¹⁰⁷ Buddy Collette led still another dance band, the Topflighters. “I was just a kid,” says Watkins. “The three years in that band were my education.”¹⁰⁸ The bands played for navy functions and cadet dances. They also recorded for broadcast every week. Though Forbes put a good face on his reports to Local 6, Watkins recalls that meetings of the subsidiary, which normally took place at a private home or the Elks Club, were for the most part suspended during the war years. Even before the United States entered the war, Local 6 had trouble collecting dues and taxes from its subsidiary; in 1940 it took that task away from Forbes, announcing prominently in each issue of *The Musical News* that members were to deal directly with the business agent of Local 6.

white and colored—frequently lost charters and might be rechartered later with new numbers. Every month the *International Musician* listed new or disbanded groups.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the board meeting of 9 April 1935 describe the forthcoming organizational meeting (*The Musical News* 18/5 [May 1935]: 11–12).

¹⁰⁵ “Baranco Band Loses Out at Dawn Cafe,” *The Spokesman*, 24 May 1935, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Board meeting of 27 October 1942 (*The Musical News* 25/12 [December 1942]: 12).

¹⁰⁷ Jim Goggin, *Earl Watkins: The Life of a Jazz Drummer* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2005), chap. 2. Although this book contains a number of errors, it includes valuable photographs and documents, as well as interviews with Watkins.

¹⁰⁸ Watkins, phone conversation, 9 October 2006. Collette discusses how he formed the Topflighters after declining to play baritone sax in Marshal Royal’s band in *Jazz Generations: A Life in American Music and Society* (London: Continuum, 2000), 55–61.

The white local, on the other hand, stayed quite healthy; by September 1942 its membership had grown to 3,400.¹⁰⁹ The following year, however, it became embroiled in an internal scandal set off by none other than secretary Eddie Love. James Petrillo, who had succeeded Joseph Weber as president of the AFM in 1940, offered Love a position as one of his assistants in New York. No sooner had Love left San Francisco than treasurer Clarence King began receiving reports of financial irregularities. Five months of correspondence between King and Love (reprinted in full in *The Musical News*) and numerous phone calls and letters between King and various claimants gradually brought to light an alarming history of dishonesty: between 1936 and 1942 Love had embezzled \$8,228.30 from Local 6 (equivalent to over \$96,000 in 2006). He stole some money from fines levied on individuals, but the bulk of the funds came from radio standby fees. Radio stations in this era not only hired live performers but also paid for standbys. The union provided amateurs in this capacity and put the money in a fund to pay unemployed members for playing at nonprofit events. Love simply failed to report these standby fees and deposited the money in his personal account. Though King had suspected some irregularities, his office handled “close to a half million dollars a year and fifty thousand transactions.” Love easily avoided detection.¹¹⁰

Infuriated by these discoveries, the officers brought Love back from New York and charged him with fraud. At a meeting on 7 May 1943, he pleaded guilty to all charges, but asked for leniency based on his many years of dedicated service. His colleagues were not persuaded. At a general meeting a week later, a petition with fifty-four signatures was presented, urging the board to press criminal charges.¹¹¹ Instead, the local's administration settled for repayment. Love paid off part of the debt in cash, handed over a car, and agreed to monthly payments of \$50. He lost his job in New York, was expelled from the AFM, and went to work in the shipyards. By August 1945 he was unemployed and pleaded for a reduction in his payments. Two months later he applied for a booker's license; Local 6's board recommended against issuing it.¹¹² Despite Herculean efforts to uncover the details of the embezzlement, Clarence King also took a fall; after twenty-nine years of service he was defeated as treasurer by James Voss in the election of December 1943.¹¹³

Meanwhile, Local 6 and its subsidiary appeared to be operating on a quite cordial, if highly unequal basis. In February 1943, the Local 6 board sent Forbes as one of its representatives to the California-Arizona-Nevada Conference, and each January he sponsored a cheerful New Year's ad in *The Musical News*. As business for the subsidiary picked up in 1944, Local 6's board voted Forbes two raises.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ *The Musical News*, 25/9 (September 1942): 6.

¹¹⁰ Clarence King, “The Facts and Correspondence in the Eddie B. Love Case,” *The Musical News* 26/8 (August 1943): 15–25; and 26/9 (September 1943): 15–19. The specific quote is on 26/9, 19.

¹¹¹ Board meetings of 7 and 13 May 1943 (*The Musical News* 26/5 [May 1943]: 15–17, 18–19).

¹¹² Board meetings of 24 August and 23 October 1945 (*The Musical News* 28/10 [October 1945]: 4; and 28/11 [November 1945]: 12).

¹¹³ *The Musical News* 27/1 (January 1944): 2.

¹¹⁴ Board meetings of 18 January 1944: salary raised to \$75/mo. (*The Musical News* 27/3 [March 1944]: 3) and 19 September 1944: salary raised to \$100/mo. (*The Musical News* 27/10 [October 1944]: 20).

Even at the national level, AFM officers began to show more awareness of racial issues. In the late 1950s, Petrillo asserted that “one of my first acts when I became president [in 1940] . . . was to insist on the abolition of the ‘subsidiary’ local status for negro locals and the establishment of the same autonomous rule and charter that the white local enjoyed.”¹¹⁵ Petrillo’s support for this policy change must have spurred its passage, but his claims of sole responsibility and early timing were overstated. The vote to eliminate subsidiaries took place four years after his election, prompted by a petition from the black delegates. A prominent announcement on the front page of the July 1944 *International Musician* states: “The colored delegates to the Chicago convention appointed the following delegation to represent them before the International Executive Board, requesting that the Board consider granting the subsidiary colored locals full autonomy and that subsidiary locals be abolished.” Listed below this announcement are the names of six delegates from “colored locals” (*not* subsidiaries) in Cleveland, Atlanta, Chicago, Buffalo, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC. Indeed, the subsidiaries could not have sent such a delegation, since they had no representation or voting rights. Instead, their colleagues, enfranchised in separate affiliates, spoke for them. The IEB, in response, voted unanimously to abolish subsidiary charters for the twelve locals operating under this status.¹¹⁶

Beginning in November 1944, notices of newly chartered “colored” locals appear in the *International Musician* every few months. Some of these locals had been subsidiaries (St. Louis, Fort Worth, Richmond, Lexington, Atlantic City); others were new (such as Fort Wayne, Norfolk, and Des Moines). The situation in San Francisco, however, became more complicated. On 21 June 1945, the IEB considered a letter from Subsidiary 6 “wherein that local states that it prefers to remain a subsidiary local instead of being granted a separate charter.”¹¹⁷ No reason is given for this surprising request—nor was the IEB inclined to grant it. The subsequent actions of Forbes and his colleagues, however, suggest that the petition was designed to appease Local 6 in the hope of obtaining a status more desirable than that of a parallel “colored” local. In June 1945, the subsidiary held a banquet for the officers of Local 6, for which it received commendation and a letter of appreciation. In August, Forbes formally thanked the officers “for the excellent service which is being rendered to [the subsidiary’s] members, particularly the expert reporting and accounting of their funds.” He offered “as a token of appreciation the sum of \$100 to be taken from their funds each month.” The board accepted this gracious offer. Then, at the end of September, Forbes presented a petition “regarding absorption

¹¹⁵ “Petrillo Talks!” *Down Beat*, 16 May 1957, 19, 41.

¹¹⁶ *International Musician*, July 1944, 1. The twelve subsidiaries were: Anaconda (Mont.), Atlantic City (N.J.), Columbia (S.C.), Fort Worth (Tex.), Galveston (Tex.), Lexington (Ky.), Little Rock (Ark.), Richmond (Va.), St. Louis (Mo.), San Francisco, Steubenville (Ohio), and Tulsa (Okla.). Eight of the twelve eventually received their own charter (information derived from listings of locals in the AFM *Proceedings* from 1942 to 1961). At the same 1944 conference Marian Anderson held delegates “spellbound” in a performance with the Chicago Symphony and Chicago’s Local 208 provided much of the entertainment.

¹¹⁷ IEB meeting of 21 June 1945, *International Musician*, August 1945, 19.

of the Subsidiary Local in Local No. 6." The board informed him "as to method of procedure in placing this request on the ballot."¹¹⁸

Earl Watkins heard from colleagues (now deceased) that Local 6's board rejected Forbes's proposal. Further discussions of the issue are not recorded in the minutes, however; nor is any formal decision mentioned. In fact, the merger proposal never came up for a vote. Instead, a delegation of members from Local 6 and its subsidiary met with the IEB on 17 January 1946 in Chicago. The following day the IEB determined that a new "colored" charter should be issued.¹¹⁹ On 7 March 1946, Musicians' Protective Union, Local No. 669 was officially chartered. Its jurisdiction was identical to that of Local 6.

Thus the San Francisco locals returned to their pre-1934 status: two separate, but (nominally) equal affiliates, one white, one "colored." Though the union situation might have looked the same, however, the demographics of San Francisco had changed radically. The war brought a major influx of African American citizens to Northern California, most of them attracted by the availability of skilled jobs in the shipbuilding industry during the early 1940s. The black population of San Francisco jumped from 4,846 in 1940 (0.8 percent) to 43,502 ten years later (5.6 percent). These new residents crowded into the Western Addition, where inexpensive housing became available after the deportation of thousands of Japanese Americans to internment camps.

The new immigrants of the 1940s brought with them indigenous musical styles (such as rural blues) and the vastly expanded African American community fostered a lively club scene—a virtual "Harlem of the West,"¹²⁰ as Pepin and Watts titled their book on the subject. Jack's Tavern, where Saunders King made a name for himself, was the first club managed by (and catering to) African Americans. It had opened in the Western Addition in 1933 and was soon followed by the Club Alabam in 1935, run by Lester Mapp who had managed similar establishments (including the famous Purcell's) in the city's notorious Barbary Coast district.¹²¹ Other noteworthy clubs in the prewar years include the Town Club and Minnie's Can-Do, where Earl Watkins first played in 1940. By the end of the 1940s, the area that came to be known as the Fillmore District was bustling with such establishments: Pepin and Watts show twenty clubs and theaters lined up along a nine-block strip on Fillmore from Pine to Turk, and another twelve nearby: e.g., Elsie's Breakfast Nook/Harold

¹¹⁸ On the banquet: board meetings of 19 and 29 June 1945 (*The Musical News* 28/7 [July 1945]: 8, and 28/8 [August 1945]: 3). On the offer of payment for services by Subsidiary 6: board meeting of 24 August 1945 (*The Musical News* 28/10 [October 1945]: 5). On the petition for absorption: board meeting of 25 September 1945 (*The Musical News* 28/10 [October 1945]: 22).

¹¹⁹ IEB meeting of 18 January 1946, *International Musician*, April 1946, 24. See also the minutes of the Local 6 board meeting of 12 February 1946 (*The Musical News* 29/4 [April 1946]: 3). These notices contain two errors; they state (a) that subsidiaries were abolished in 1942 rather than 1944 (a check through the minutes of 1942 reveals no discussion of this issue); and (b) that the IEB decision was made on 19 January (the correct date is 18 January). They also imply that all other subsidiaries had become independent colored locals; in fact, only four such transitions are recorded in the *International Musician* prior to the action regarding Locals 6 and 669.

¹²⁰ The book is excellently researched and contains priceless photographs that have been beautifully restored. Several of the map locations are slightly misplaced, however.

¹²¹ On Purcell's and the Barbary Coast scene, particularly in the era before 1921, see Stoddard, *Jazz on the Barbary Coast*.

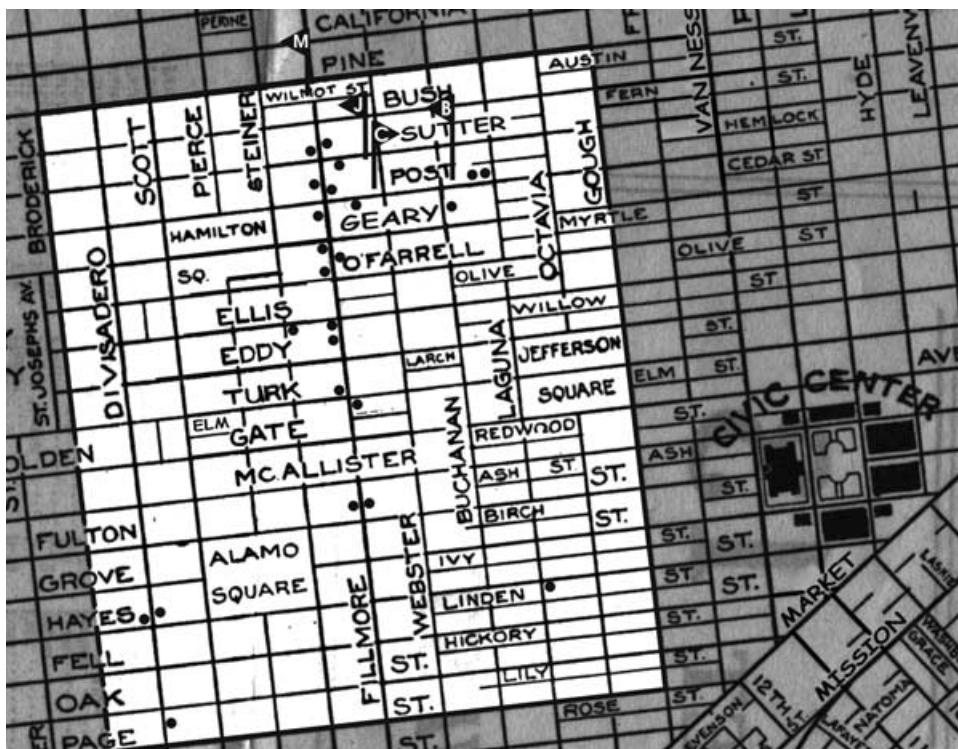


FIGURE 6. Post-World War II clubs in San Francisco's Fillmore district. Dots indicate club locations. Specific references mark clubs highlighted in the article: J = Jack's Tavern, C = Club Alabam, M = Minnie's Can-Do, B = Bop City.

Blackshear's Café Society, The Havana Club, The Long Bar, The New Orleans Swing Club, Jackson's Nook, The Plantation Club, The Club Flamingo, and, most prominently, Jimbo's Bop City (see Figure 6). This famous club opened in 1949 as Vout City but the next year was taken over by Jimbo Edwards who ran a cafe in front (Jimbo's Waffle Shop) and a club in back. Bop City became renowned for after-hours jam sessions where musicians exchanged the latest styles such as bebop; it "quickly became a magnet for every famous and not so famous jazz musician visiting San Francisco."¹²²

These Fillmore District clubs provided gratifying employment for African American jazz musicians such as Watkins, Lowe, Richardson, the Alley Brothers (Vernon and his older brother Eddie, a drummer), and many others, such as John Handy, Johnnie Cooper, Frank Jackson, and Johnnie Ingram. I asked Watkins why the situation in the late 1940s didn't erupt into the confrontations that had characterized the 1930s. "We simply didn't go to the white clubs," he said, "but lots of young white musicians came to us."¹²³ Indeed, the postwar boom years in San Francisco saw less

¹²² Pepin and Watts, *Harlem of the West*, 138. For a detailed discussion and history of Bop City, see Carol P. Chamberland, "The House that Bop Built," *California History* 75/3 (Fall 1996): 272–83. Bop City closed in 1965.

¹²³ Watkins, interview with Leta Miller and Alissa Roedig, 14 August 2006.

racial competition for jobs than the 1930s, not only because of the economic upturn, but (more importantly) because the exponential growth of the black community ushered in an African American club scene more than equal in excitement and innovation to its white counterpart east of Van Ness. Thus the demographic changes of the 1940s contributed to changes in musical style and created an employment situation that was more segregated—but less confrontational—than that of the Depression years.

In terms of community relations, however, Watkins recalls significant exclusion in this period. Blacks were barred from some hotels, bars, restaurants, and other venues. He was once refused a drink at the Stage Door on a break during his own performance with the St. Mary's Band, and remembers restaurants in Chinatown that drew curtains around their black customers so as not to "offend" the white clientele.¹²⁴ At the same time, national attention began to turn more seriously to civil rights, prompted by the sacrifices of black military personnel during the war and increasingly outspoken advocacy by African Americans and liberal whites. If the large new black community in San Francisco occasioned some racist responses from local entrepreneurs, its members also agitated, often successfully, for equal rights, and developed an active and inspiring musical culture. Some successes among personnel we have already encountered here were also noted in the white press. In 1949, for instance, the *Chronicle*, which before the war rarely mentioned or pictured any African Americans, published an extended article on Baranco, who was pursuing a bachelor's degree at the University of California, Berkeley and teaching bebop at UC Extension in the same town.¹²⁵

1956–60: Amalgamation

Though African American musicians may have found artistic fulfillment in the Fillmore clubs, racial separation in the union rankled. It also continued to lead to nasty confrontations nationwide, such as an incident in Miami in 1949, when contractor Earl Hodges, a member of (integrated) Local 802 in New York, hired a black band to play on a series of jazz concerts. In a move reminiscent of San Francisco in 1934, (white) Local 655 sought to have the club placed on the forbidden territory list, claiming sole jurisdiction over certain municipal areas. Black Local 690 countered that its 1946 charter contained no such restriction.¹²⁶ To complicate matters, mixed bands were increasingly common, making the dual union system not only uncomfortable but also cumbersome. Watkins and pianist Ernie Lewis, for instance, played Dixieland with Bob Scobey's Frisco Jazz Band at the Tin Angel, Black Hawk, and other clubs in San Francisco, but when the band toured they had to register with "colored" locals and often stay in separate hotels.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ "He Teaches Be-Bop and Studies Bach," *Chronicle*, 4 July 1949, 9.

¹²⁶ "Battle Jim Crow in Miami Locals," *Down Beat*, 23 September 1949, 1–2. The club operator described considerable pressure from the white union; for two weeks its officers showed up right before the show and kept a packed house waiting for an hour while checking credentials.

¹²⁷ Photos, news clips, and interview excerpts in Goggin, *Earl Watkins*, chaps. 4 and 5.

The AFM was also out of step with other labor unions. The landmark California State Supreme Court case *James v. Marinship* (2 January 1945) forced the boilermakers to abandon “auxiliary” black locals. (The boilermakers represented about 70 percent of workers at Bay Area shipyards.) Like AFM subsidiary unions, members of such auxiliaries paid dues but had no voting rights, no representation at the national convention, no independent business agents, and smaller insurance benefits. The instigator of the legal challenge was Joseph James, who was not only a welder but also a singer. He had studied music at the Boston Conservatory and came to San Francisco to perform in the “Swing Mikado” led by Elmer Keeton at the Golden Gate Exposition in 1939.¹²⁸ (After the war James returned to his musical pursuits.) By 1948 Bay Area boilermakers’ locals were fully integrated. When Fred Stripp studied racial policies in 163 San Francisco unions in 1950, he found striking progress toward integration, even among the traditionally exclusionary machinists and carpenters. The Hotel and Restaurant Workers, Commercial Telegraphers, Blacksmiths, Railway Clerks and Carmen had all “removed the color bar from their membership requirements.” Stripp counted five large, exclusionary, white unions remaining in San Francisco. Among them was Musicians’ Local 6.¹²⁹

Although the tone of the *International Musician* from this period suggests increasing embarrassment over the tradition of segregated locals, the AFM found itself in an awkward predicament. With more than fifty “colored” affiliates in existence and a firm commitment to respecting local autonomy, the organization felt constrained about flexing its muscles except in cases where it had direct jurisdiction. The result was a deliberately cautious policy, with the national organization encouraging and cajoling but not mandating change. In a twenty-six-page 1954 article on “Civil Rights in the American Federation of Musicians,” William Steeper devoted only one page to the status of African Americans.¹³⁰ Noting that “in some . . . cities the colored members prefer to maintain their own local(s),” Steeper enumerated the purported benefits of separation: the black members “are guaranteed representation, since they thereby have their own elected officers. Even more important, they are entitled to delegates to the Convention.” He cited some progress toward integration, such as an incident at the 1946 convention in St. Petersburg, Florida, when local residents complained to authorities that the AFM would not separate the races at a picnic. Petrillo cancelled the event, sacrificing substantial prepaid rental fees. The food was donated to charity. At the same time, however, there is considerable defensiveness (and some condescension) in Steeper’s conclusion that “the colored musician holds no secondary class membership insofar as the Federation is concerned. He may be denied admission in certain locals, which are

¹²⁸ On this case, see the excellent article by Charles Wollenberg, “James vs. Marinship: Trouble on the New Black Frontier,” *California History* 60/3 (Fall 1981): 262–79. A similar battle with the boilermakers’ union was going on in Los Angeles in the same period; one of the leaders of that protest group, Andrew Blakeney, was also a musician. See Josh Sides, “Battle on the Home Front: African American Shipyard Workers in World War II Los Angeles,” *California History* 75/3 (Fall 1996): 251–63.

¹²⁹ Fred Stripp, “The Treatment of Negro-American Workers by the AFL and the CIO in the San Francisco Bay Area,” *Social Forces* 28/3 (March 1950): 330–32.

¹³⁰ William P. Steeper, “Civil Rights in the American Federation of Musicians,” *International Musician*, December 1954, S1–S26. The section on “colored locals” is on page S24.

in the minority, but he is granted the privilege of joining any other neighboring local that will accept him.”¹³¹

Although black locals were indeed in the minority, they included many of the country's largest cities. In 1954, when Steeper's article was published, fifty-three black locals are listed in the AFM proceedings, out of a total of 701. Though Steeper states that the majority were in the South, by my count thirty were not; in addition to San Francisco, there were six in Ohio, three in Connecticut and Pennsylvania, two in Illinois and Iowa, and others spread across the country from Washington state to Washington, DC (see Table 1).

The Los Angeles locals—Nos. 47 (white) and 767 (“colored”)—had just merged the previous year, bolstered by support from a biracial group of activists. *Down Beat* focused the spotlight on the L.A. unions in 1949, reporting on a city ordinance introduced by councilman Edward Royball to prohibit employment discrimination based on race or creed.¹³² The union merger, however, ultimately represented the coalescence of efforts on several fronts. Marl Young attributes the impetus to singer Estelle Edson, at the time a graduate student at UCLA working on a thesis on “The Negro in Radio.” Her concern was that black musicians were being closed out of studio work. At the time, dialogue was also under way in Los Angeles jazz circles. Buddy Collette, Charles Mingus, Red Callender, and others were actively fostering the idea of amalgamation through musical and social collaboration with white colleagues. Mixed bands, as well as organizations such as the Community Symphony Orchestra and the Groucho Marx Show Orchestra under Jerry Fielding, brought musicians from the two unions into productive collaboration. The separate locals seemed increasingly anachronistic.

Employment problems were not restricted to the studios, of course. In 1951, Charles Emge cited a slump in the “dance and nitery business during the last two years,” which, he claimed, hit members of 767 harder than those in the white union. He predicted that the black local might even “reach the disintegration stage due to financial problems.”¹³³ Indeed, since the Taft-Hartley Act had outlawed the closed shop, many musicians found the union itself irrelevant. They simply bypassed the organization and undercut its wage scales.

Despite meetings with the pro-amalgamation group, Local 47's board of directors hesitated, fearing job losses and financial costs (such as higher death benefits). Local 767 was also split, with some officers resisting the loss of the black local's independence. After enormous publicity in the local papers and a letter signed by 350 members, Local 47 placed the question on its ballot in December 1952. The resolution passed by a margin of 54 to 46 percent. Local 767 overwhelmingly voted its approval on the first Monday of 1953 and, with the aid of Petrillo, the IEB, and

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, S24.

¹³² “Jim Crow in L.A. Local 47 to Face Legal Showdown,” *Down Beat*, 21 October 1949, 1.

¹³³ Information and quotations in this paragraph are taken from Marl Young, “The Amalgamation of Locals 47 and 767,” *The Overture*, December 1988, <http://www.promusic47.org/benefits/amalgam.asp>; Charles Emge, “Move Grows to Scrap L.A.'s Jim Crow Union,” *Down Beat*, 15 June 1951, 1, 19; Red Callender and Elaine Cohen, *Unfinished Dream: The Musical World of Red Callender* (London: Quartet Books, 1985), 99–109; telephone interview with Buddy Collette, 6 November 2006; and Collette, *Jazz Generations*, 110–20.

TABLE 1. "Colored" musicians' locals in 1954.

Data are taken from the AFM *Proceedings* of 1954. Los Angeles's Local 767 had merged with its white counterpart, Local 47, the previous year. Locals and their memberships changed monthly; therefore this information represents the situation in the middle of this particular year, when the convention took place. Membership numbers are given in the *Proceedings* for locals sending representatives to the convention. Where such data are missing, the listing from the previous or succeeding year provided an approximate size. Charter dates are not listed in the *Proceedings* until the 1950s. Where an earlier colored local existed, its number is given in the fifth column. For comparison, the corresponding white local number and membership in 1954 are given in the sixth column.

Local #	City	Charter date	No. of members (if known)	Earlier colored local #	White local #: membership
168	Dallas, TX	November 1919	53		147: 980
185	Parkersburg, WV	June 1916	24		259: 87
197	St. Louis, MO	October 1944	351	44	2: 1,478
208	Chicago, IL	July 1902	1,081		10: 11,355
242	Youngstown, OH	October 1919	24		86: 646
274	Philadelphia, PA	January 1935	770	591	77: 4,689
286	Toledo, OH	February 1924	55		15: 463
335	Hartford, CT	October 1928	68		400: 670
392	Fort Worth, TX	November 1944	48		72: 446
455	Uniontown, PA	July 1937			596: 458
462	Atlanta, GA	August 1937	161		148: 408
471	Pittsburgh, PA	January 1908	99		60: 2,231
473	Dayton, OH	September 1939	84	635	101: 588
486	New Haven, CT	July 1924	25		234: 628
493	Seattle, WA	November 1924	103	458 (1918)	76: 2,040
496	New Orleans, LA	June 1926	355		174: 801
533	Buffalo, NY	February 1917	135		43: 1,177
535	Boston, MA	August 1915	153		9: 2,382
543	Baltimore, MD	November 1918	278		40: 1,218
548	Pensacola, FL	December 1937	23		283: 130
549	Bridgeport, CT	October 1941	43		63: 401
550	Cleveland, OH	July 1910	274		4: 2,612
558	Omaha, NE	December 1920	73		70: 631
587	Milwaukee, WI	August 1924	108		8: 2,580
589	Columbus, OH	May 1912	162		103: 838
613	Mobile, AL	January 1942	75	465	407: 114
622	Gary, IN	October 1938	85		none
623	Denver, CO	October 1938	91	753	20: 1,092
627	Kansas City, MO	March 1917	215		34: 1,335
632	Jacksonville, FL	March 1942	61	702	444: 287
635	Lexington, KY	April 1946	ca. 40		554: 254
637	Louisville, KY	August 1928	96		11: 645
641	Wilmington, DE	February 1939	78	449	311: 293
658	San Antonio, TX	August 1947	69	702	23: 589
665	Topeka, KS	August 1947	38	783	36: 266
669	San Francisco, CA	March 1946	346	648 (1923)	6: 5,185
675	Springfield, IL	July 1914	75		19: 306
690	Miami, FL	August 1946			655: 2,509
695	Richmond, VA	April 1945	ca. 50	775, 38	123: 253
698	Asheville, NC	March 1945	28		377: 35
699	Houston, TX	June 1950	204		65: 903
701	Wichita, KS	October 1952	35		297: 598
702	Norfolk, VA	January 1946	ca. 100	676	125: 352
703	Oklahoma City, OK	October 1947	56		375: 599
708	Atlantic City, NJ	April 1945	49		661: 425
710	Washington D.C.	March 1922	173		161: 1,578
718	Montgomery, AL	September 1947	63	300	479: 82
722	Newport News, VA	September 1947	88		199: 118
733	Birmingham, AL	May 1927	173		256: 315
740	Des Moines, IA	September 1947	35	632, 799	75: 486
743	Sioux City, IA	September 1927	25		254: ca. 190
808	Tulsa, OK	July 1944	53		94: 673
814	Cincinnati, OH	June 1922	128		1: 1,152

Herman Kenin (who would succeed Petrillo as president in 1958), the two groups merged on 1 April 1953.

A few years later, Seattle's locals amalgamated. The 2,100-member Local 76 and the 100-member Local 493 voted to merge at the end of 1956 but official action was delayed until January 1958 when 493's property was sold.¹³⁴

In San Francisco the road to merger proved considerably more rocky. Despite continued separation, relations between Locals 6 and 669 seemed, on the surface, good. Local 669 rented two rooms on the third floor of Local 6's building on Jones Street. Its constitution and bylaws were identical to those of Local 6 (with merely a different cover) and the two branches operated with the same pay scales.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, blacks in San Francisco were acutely aware (and resentful) of their second-class status. "There was animosity," recalls Watkins, "and it was all about employment and jealousy. You see, so many of the white musicians weren't very good at improvising; and if you had a jazz club and were a Caucasian owner, and a hot black band came in, you'd want to hire them."¹³⁶

In the spring of 1956, Al Forbes died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Local 6's secretary Jack Haywood wrote a moving (if somewhat patronizing) eulogy:

During the many years [Forbes] was in office, his consultations with the officers of Local No. 6 were countless, his honesty, integrity and courage outstanding, and his cooperation with Local No. 6 invariable. Nothing was too hard or onerous for him to undertake.

We of Local No. 6 miss his cheery laugh and pleasant voice around the building, and we join his three daughters, his brother officers and members of Local No. 669, in deploring the passing of a good friend, a good officer of his Union, and a man who was a credit to his race. His footsteps will be hard indeed for anyone to follow.¹³⁷

At the time, Local 669's president Elma Graves was already discussing merger with Local 6's board. In fact, a year earlier (June 1955) Graves and the other San Francisco convention delegates had appeared before the IEB on the matter of amalgamation, but "due to certain complex circumstances" (left undefined), the matter was referred to Petrillo.¹³⁸ In August 1956, Graves officially notified Local 6's board that 669 wanted a merger proposal placed on the December ballot. The two groups met on 20 October to work out details. Representing the black union were Graves, secretary-treasurer Sammy Simpson, business agent Samuel Landers, and members Earl Watkins, Ike Bell, Eugene Godfrey, Vernon Alley, Wilbert Baranco, and Leroy Hueston.¹³⁹ "Proposition No. 1, Calling for Amalgamation of Local

¹³⁴ Special thanks to Seattle's secretary-treasurer Warren Johnson, who searched for and sent me excerpts from Local 76's minutes and monthly magazine, *Musicland* (December 1956, 1–2; March 1957, 1; February 1958, 1). For the detailed history of black Local 493, see Keller, "Seattle's Segregated Musicians' Local."

¹³⁵ In 1957, the officers of Local 669 complained to the IEB that they were not being consulted about price changes, but the minutes report that the situation was being corrected and that "it is anticipated that the cause for the complaint has been removed." AFM *Proceedings* of 1957, 333.

¹³⁶ Watkins, interview with Miller and Roedig.

¹³⁷ *The Musical News* 39/6 (June 1956): 6.

¹³⁸ AFM *Proceedings* of 1955, 445.

¹³⁹ Board meetings of 8 May 1956 (*The Musical News* 39/6 [June 1956]: 13); 28 August 1956 (*The Musical News* 39/10 [October 1956]: 6); and 20 October 1956 (*The Musical News* 40/2 [February 1957]: 3, 5).

No. 669 with Local No. 6,” specified terms quite unfavorable to the African American group. All physical equipment and all funds revealed by an audit of its financial records (to be conducted by a firm chosen by Local 6) would become property of Local 6, and “no member of Local 669 . . . will hold an appointive office except as directed under the by-laws of Local 6.”¹⁴⁰ The only possible cost to Local 6 came in the form of death benefits. Even here, the transition was to be gradual: 669 members would be entitled to \$500 during the first six months, \$1,000 from six months to two years, and the full benefit of \$1,500 only after two full years of membership. Graves and Simpson wrote an extended argument in favor of the proposition for the ballot, noting that “the two Locals have operated side by side, their members working under exactly the same rules, regulations and scale, with Local 669 always accepting the scale and contractual conditions set by Local 6.” They emphasized the financial strength of 669: “No member of Local 6 will lose by the merger and no member will weaken his stake in the A. F. of M. or Local 6.” They also took out a large ad in *The Musical News*, urging a yes vote on the proposal “for the greater benefit and strength of all.” The brief argument against merger was written by Jess Jessup, who offered no substantive reason other than the money and “heartaches” expended by members of Local 6 to build up “one of the finest Locals in the Federation.”

Watkins recalls that as the vote approached some officers of Local 6 visited clubs to press the case against amalgamation. At the same time, an article in the *Chronicle* claimed that the merger was supported by both Petrillo and Local 6’s board.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the vote reflected sharply divided opinion. Despite the highly favorable terms for Local 6, the naysayers triumphed: the proposition was defeated, 554-786. Only 25 percent of Local 6’s 5,400 members cast ballots, however, and in this context the energetic opposition could exert more influence than might otherwise have been the case. (Members had to vote in person either at the San Francisco office or the Oakland branch. This low turnout was typical for union elections until a mail ballot was instigated in 1980.) The following week Ralph Gleason scolded Local 6 in the press. Noting that mixed bands, a rarity “fifteen years ago,” were now common, Gleason wrote: “It hardly seems necessary to point out how utterly out of step with history this [vote] was. . . . Unless musicians open their eyes as well as their ears, music will lose its place as a force for human rights.”¹⁴²

Meanwhile, members of the recently integrated Los Angeles union pressed for passage of an antisegregation resolution at the AFM convention in June 1957. Resolution 34, submitted by Max Herman of L.A.’s Local 47, required segregated locals to “take immediate steps to eliminate any membership restrictions based upon race, color, creed, religion or place of national origin.” It also empowered the IEB “to take the necessary steps to eliminate such membership restrictions” in cases where progress was slow. The resolution sparked considerable controversy, even among the African American members, who were far from united. An opposing

¹⁴⁰ The ballot measure, specifying terms of the proposed merger, along with arguments pro and con, is printed in *The Musical News* 39/11 (November 1956): 6. See also the ad on page 16.

¹⁴¹ “Musicians [*sic*] Union Votes Segregation,” *Chronicle*, 7 December 1956, 1, 4.

¹⁴² “Musicians [*sic*] Union Isn’t in Tune with History,” *Chronicle*, 13 December 1956, 33; also quoted in *Variety*, 19 December 1956, 58.

petition signed by sixty delegates—fifty-six from black locals—expressed concern about “the financial aspect involved with some of the larger colored locals, who have spent many years of hard work to attain their present status in the Federation.”¹⁴³ The petitioners urged independent action in each city. Some of the larger black locals were signatories: Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Houston, Birmingham, New Orleans, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Washington, DC, Cleveland, and Columbus. San Francisco’s Local 669, however, was not among them. George Seltzer suggests that some of these affiliates had higher per capita treasuries than their corresponding white locals. (Several of them, such as Chicago’s 208, which had a membership of 1,250 in 1957, were powerful independent voices within the Federation.) Some black officers feared losing their jobs; others felt uncomfortable merging with white locals that didn’t want them.¹⁴⁴

The resolution was referred to the office of the president, an action for which the AFM was taken to task by Donald Janson in the *New York Times*. Noting that the organization had “in effect acted . . . to continue its policy of racially segregated locals,” Janson quoted Petrillo as stating that he “was personally opposed to segregation but . . . even more strongly opposed to compelling locals to integrate.”¹⁴⁵ At the same time Petrillo warned white locals that “if a colored local wants to join you, you had better take them in. Because if you don’t we’re going to force you to.” In a preface to this statement, widely understood to refer to San Francisco, he warned: “There’s one white local here which doesn’t want to take in its colored local.” Pressed by the San Francisco news media, Local 6’s officers declined comment; 669’s president Sammy Simpson was quoted as saying, with remarkable patience, “You can’t force things. . . . We’ll just wait it out.”¹⁴⁶

Although the AFM couldn’t (or wouldn’t) “force things,” the state of California could. On 16 April 1959, Governor Pat Brown signed into law a Fair Employment Practices Act that specified (among other things) that labor organizations could not refuse membership on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, or ancestry. It also prohibited segregated locals. Attorney general Stanley Mosk appointed Franklin H. Williams, West Coast executive secretary of the NAACP, to head his department’s civil rights section. On 19 October, while Local 6 was in the midst of discussing how to implement the new law, Walter Browne—a former counselor with the Alameda County parole office, and a guitarist and folksinger—decided to join the union.¹⁴⁷ Browne went to the joint office on Jones Street and mounted the stairs to Local 669’s headquarters. The secretary was late and Browne’s parking meter was running out. He went down to feed it and on the way back ran into Charles (“Pop”) Kennedy, president of Local 6. Kennedy told him there were two unions and he could join either one. As a folksinger, Browne decided that membership in Local 6 might be most useful. Not realizing that he was making history, he completed the application, paid his fees, and, on 20 October 1959, was admitted to Local 6.

¹⁴³ The resolution and petition are published in the *International Musician*, November 1957, 42–43.

¹⁴⁴ Seltzer, *Music Matters*, 110.

¹⁴⁵ Donald Janson, “A.F.M. Shelves Bid for Integration,” *New York Times*, 14 June 1957, 22.

¹⁴⁶ “Musicians Here Told to End Jim Crow,” *Chronicle*, 18 June 1957, 1, 7.

¹⁴⁷ The story of Browne joining Local 6 is told colorfully by Ralph J. Gleason in “A Blow to Jim Crow,” *Down Beat*, 10 December 1959, 14–15.

A week later assistant attorney general Franklin Williams met with the union's board of directors. He reported that he would be sending identical letters to Locals 6 and 669 requesting immediate action to effect amalgamation, and offered to act as mediator. Local 6's officers assured him that the merger terms could be arranged without external involvement.¹⁴⁸

Williams's letters were dated 2 November, postmarked 4 November, and delivered 5 November. On 3 November Pop Kennedy received a call from a local reporter asking for comments on the document, which he had not yet seen. The following day articles appeared in local and national publications casting Local 6 in a negative light. Information in these and other news reports contain numerous errors: in addition to misspellings, wrong dates, and incorrect tabulation of the number of dual locals nationwide, the papers reported that the 1935 subsidiary had been formed because Local 648 suffered from financial problems; that in 1945 the subsidiary had requested separate status; that Browne was admitted to Local 6 under pressure from Williams; and that San Francisco and Philadelphia had spearheaded the 1957 resolution seeking the abolition of dual unions.¹⁴⁹ (As noted above, the petition originated with Local 47 in Los Angeles; delegates from Philadelphia's two locals were signatories to the opposing petition.) When Local 6's secretary Paul Rosen protested the premature leak of Williams's letter, more articles appeared in what seemed to the union's officers as "frantic efforts by some newsmen to achieve journalistic mileage."¹⁵⁰

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed. Local 669's Sammy Simpson assumed a relaxed posture, noting that his group was "not a segregated union, so [Williams's letter] doesn't affect us."¹⁵¹ He quickly added that his local welcomed amalgamation. Indeed, 669 was not exclusively African American by this time; among its members were a number of whites and Asians. (Some Asian American musicians were also members of Local 6.)

In a series of meetings in February 1960, the boards of 6 and 669 hammered out the details of the merger, assisted by officers from the International (vice president William Harris, secretary Stanley Ballard, and treasurer George Clancy). The arrangements proved considerably more favorable to 669 than the 1956 proposal. Local 669's secretary-treasurer Curtis Lowe and business agent Samuel Landers would join the Local 6 staff as coordinators. A third member (Simpson) would serve on the executive board until the election of December 1960. In addition, "all Local 669 members who are in good standing as of March 31, 1960, will enjoy the same conditions and privileges as applicable to Local 6 members." The official merger of the 400-member Local 669 and the 5,500-member Local 6 took place on

¹⁴⁸ For the relevant letters and an explanation of the situation, see "Locals 6-669 Merger Ordered," *The Musical News* 42/12 (December 1959): 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Bill Steif, "Calif. Atty. General's Merger Order to White & Negro Frisco AFM Locals; 1st Major Ukase [sic] Under State's FEP," *Variety*, 4 November 1959, 59, 62; "State Sends FEP Request to Musicians Locals," *Chronicle*, 4 November 1959, 9; and Ralph J. Gleason, "Musicians' Locals Face FEP Action," *Chronicle*, 31 October 1959, 1, 4.

¹⁵⁰ "Locals 6-669 Merger Ordered," *The Musical News*.

¹⁵¹ Steif, "Calif. Atty. General's Merger Order."

1 April.¹⁵² Lowe, however, felt compelled to write a justification to the members of 669, published in *The Musical News* in May.

Having been a member of the Subsidiary Local No. 6; Local No. 669 from its inception and finally an Official of Local No. 669, I am well aware of the many sacrifices made by the members and officials of Local No. 669 for many years to build the organization into the thriving local which it became. One cannot help but feel a deep sense of loss that this organization as such, no longer exists.

Rest assured, the American Federation of Musicians Charter of Local No. 669 *was not revoked* for failure to properly conduct its affairs, but *was retired* . . . because there no longer was a necessity for two . . . Locals in the San Francisco jurisdiction.¹⁵³

With the San Francisco merger complete, the AFM moved to amalgamate other dual locals. Denver and Sioux City merged later the same year and the Cleveland branches joined in 1962. But most did not merge until after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; and for some, the process extended into the 1970s. Some white locals were strongly resistant. Some black locals were also hesitant, fearing they would lose their identity (and representation) by being absorbed into much larger white chapters. Indeed, during the 1970s fewer blacks appeared at the national AFM conventions after failing to win elections for delegates in amalgamated unions. (In 1977, the AFM moved to reverse this trend by allowing merged locals to send an extra delegate to the convention, “to be elected from the black membership of said local.” Curtis Lowe served in that capacity for Local 6 from 1978 until his death in 1993.)

Several former members of Local 669 ran for Local 6 offices in December 1960; large campaign ads appeared in the December issue of *The Musical News*. None garnered enough votes to win a seat on the seven-member board. Vernon Alley came in ninth, Sammy Simpson tenth, and Wilbert Baranco twelfth. But soon the situation changed dramatically. Alley was elected to the board in 1963 and in the next two elections he received the highest vote total of any candidate on the ballot.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

The saga of Locals 6, 648, and 669 brings into focus a complex picture of the social and economic forces buffeting the working musician in the early twentieth century. Racialist attitudes in the US labor movement were reflected in the early history of the AFM, beginning with the initial establishment of the dual-local system in Chicago in 1902. The formal name of Chicago's 208, San Francisco's 669, and many other locals, is the “Musicians' Protective Union.” As the name implies, these unions—fly-by-night traveling theater managers who would skip town without paying musicians, restaurant owners who would stiff their employees, orchestra managers who resisted limits on rehearsal time or guarantees of employment from one season to the next. The paramount issues for the union were job security and

¹⁵² Exact membership numbers, published in the 1959 AFM *Proceedings*, are 390 for Local 669 and 5,528 for Local 6.

¹⁵³ *The Musical News* 43/5 (May 1960): 1.

¹⁵⁴ Elections were held biannually in this period. In 1963, Alley came in fifth out of twenty-two candidates; in 1965, he was first out of sixteen; in 1967 first out of thirty-two; and in 1969 second out of twenty (information from *The Musical News* election reports).

a living wage. But the “protection” it offered was for many years unequal. Black musicians were forced—or felt compelled—to organize separately and offer lower wages in order to work at all. Eventually, law mandated equality, but even that change was slow in coming.

The African American community itself showed some ambivalence toward the practice of separate organization. From the 1915 Boston breakaway local to the 1957 petition opposing forced amalgamation, black union musicians were torn between outrage at their second-class status within the AFM and the apparent benefits of working for change from within the organization’s established structures. In the teens and early 1920s, separate “colored” locals seemed a promising alternative, offering the prospect of secure employment and a presence within the national organization. And in some cases, such as Chicago, black locals proved highly effective. But in the majority of cities, these segregated affiliates operated as poor cousins, doing battle with much larger white organizations that in practice, if not theory, held the dominant position in the labor market.

For its part the AFM found itself increasingly boxed in by its historical dedication to local autonomy. As with its parent body, the AFL, the musicians’ union showed reluctance to interfere in the workings of its locals. Once established, the segregated local system guided the AFM down a path it found increasingly uncomfortable but at the same time difficult to reverse. Constrained by its history and fearful of offending its constituents, the AFM hesitated at a time when it might have acted.

With the model of discrimination officially sanctioned in many branches of the labor movement, individuals found it easy (or convenient) to rationalize the dual standard. In good times the parallel unions could operate independently, white musicians pursuing their careers unaware of (or too self-absorbed to pay attention to) their black counterparts, and black unions enjoying some measure of success in placing their members in musically satisfying, if lower-paid, work. But the desperation of the early 1930s disrupted such laissez-faire tolerance. Spurred by Eddie Love, an overzealous tyro, Local 6 was able virtually to monopolize the Bay Area job market. Its request to the Federation for a blanket “forbidden territory” restriction was spurred by the 40 percent unemployment rate of its membership, but it also aimed at crippling Local 648, whose members played at a lower scale. The local’s request, as well as Joseph Weber’s granting of such an overriding restriction, smack unpleasantly of racism.

The 1934 San Francisco crisis reflected a confluence of particularized factors. New York, for instance, had its own record of discriminatory social practices, but since Musicians’ Local 802 was integrated, the forbidden territory list could not be used as a racist tool. In Chicago black musicians certainly played at white-owned establishments, though some areas were off-limits to all but the best-known performers;¹⁵⁵ unlike San Francisco, however, musicians in this large black community had numerous outlets for remunerative work. In cities with demographics more

¹⁵⁵ A 1940 *Down Beat* article heralding the strong position and high pay scale of black musicians (“Chicago Local Typical”) also notes, in a discussion of traveling musicians, that “Jimmie Lunceford plays at one of the town’s better spots and no one [in Local 208] objects because it is evident that Lunceford isn’t taking business away from anyone. A local colored band wouldn’t get the spot under any circumstance.”

similar to San Francisco (such as Seattle), periodic confrontations arose between the two unions over scale and venue, but were typically handled on a case-by-case basis. The broad geographical restriction governing San Francisco arose through the actions of a particularly combative local secretary who mobilized fellow officers. Even they were a bit surprised by their own success. When the geographic restriction was finally lifted in 1944, vice president Ed Moore wrote that he was astonished it had held for so long.¹⁵⁶

The 1956 vote against amalgamation is more difficult to comprehend, particularly in view of increasingly vocal civil rights activism. Certainly there were those in Local 6 opposed to (or fearful of) the recently expanded black community, either because of jealousy over the exciting Fillmore scene or prejudice. But the most striking aspect of this episode is that the majority of Local 6's members simply failed to respond to the injustice within their ranks. Only a quarter of them cast ballots on an issue of vital importance to colleagues. Apathy, however, can be as dangerous as hostility. Through their failure to act, nonvoting unionists ceded power to racist elements within the organization.

In later years, San Francisco would find itself at the forefront of multiethnic collaboration, even though the roots of that spirit can be traced to a much earlier period—for example, the pre-World War II teachings of Henry Cowell, whose universalism was molded by the city's rich ethnic mix and who spent his life advocating cultural exchange and musical hybridity. Local 6, too, moved quite quickly toward equity after the 1960 amalgamation, with an almost palpable sense of relief that all was finally as it should be. Once Vernon Alley was elected to the board of directors in 1963, he continued to serve with distinction for over twenty years; he also served as an elected delegate to both the California Labor Federation and the San Francisco Labor Council. Curtis Lowe served as assistant to the secretary-treasurer from 1960 until he retired at the end of 1984. Earl Watkins, too, took a leading role in Local 6. Soon after the merger he was appointed to several committees, including the one on wages, where he served with Jess Jessup. The two men became close friends. In 1965, Pop Kennedy tapped Watkins for the position of branch secretary at the Oakland office. After it closed in 1972, Watkins moved to the main office in San Francisco, where he acted as assistant to the secretary-treasurer until 1994. He still serves on the board of directors. At eighty-six, the San Francisco drummer—who had joined Subsidiary Local 6 in 1937, served on the board of 669 in the 1940s and 1950s, and helped negotiate the 1960 merger—is now the organization's elder statesman. He is also deservedly its most articulate and respected historian.

The story of widespread racial segregation in the musicians' union—particularly in San Francisco, a city known for its openness to diversity—will come as a discomforting surprise to many. Writings about the AFM typically pass quickly over the history of segregated locals, acknowledging their existence but then moving on in embarrassed haste. To repress this tale out of our collective guilt, however, or to shy away from exploring its causes, is to perpetuate a sanitized account of our

¹⁵⁶ Moore, "End of the War."

rich American music history and delay the process of curing institutional amnesia. Local 6 has actively begun such a process. So have other branches of the AFM such as Boston's 9-535, which is gathering oral histories about its "colored" affiliate and publishing excerpts in its newsletter. By such candor, we may even succeed—at least in part—in reversing the apathy of our predecessors. As Martin Luther King Jr. cautioned us in 1958: "It may be that our generation will have to repent not only for the diabolical actions and vitriolic words of the children of darkness, but also for the crippling fears and tragic apathy of the children of light."¹⁵⁷

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